

# REBEL INDIA

BY

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*Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*, etc.

LONDON

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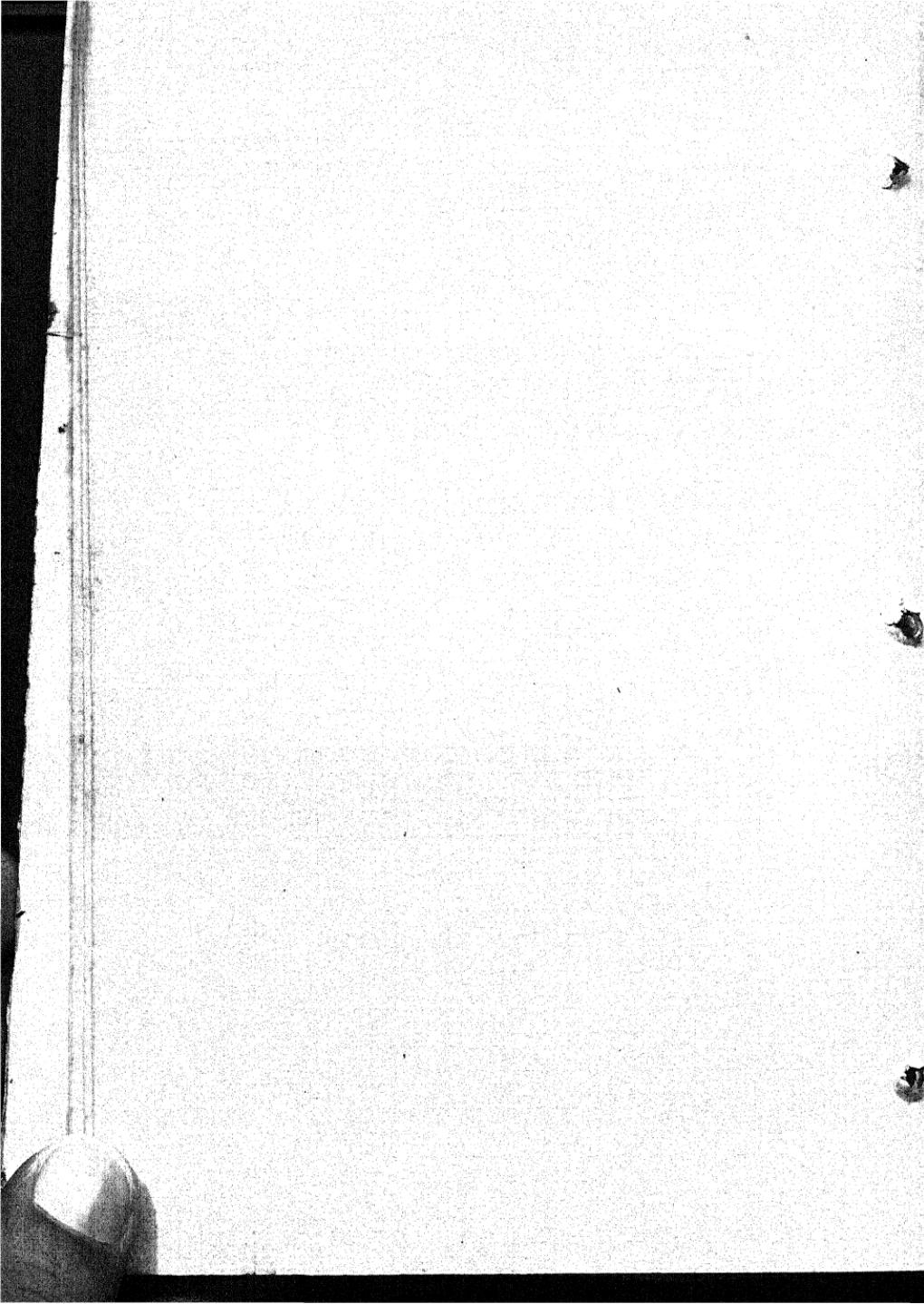
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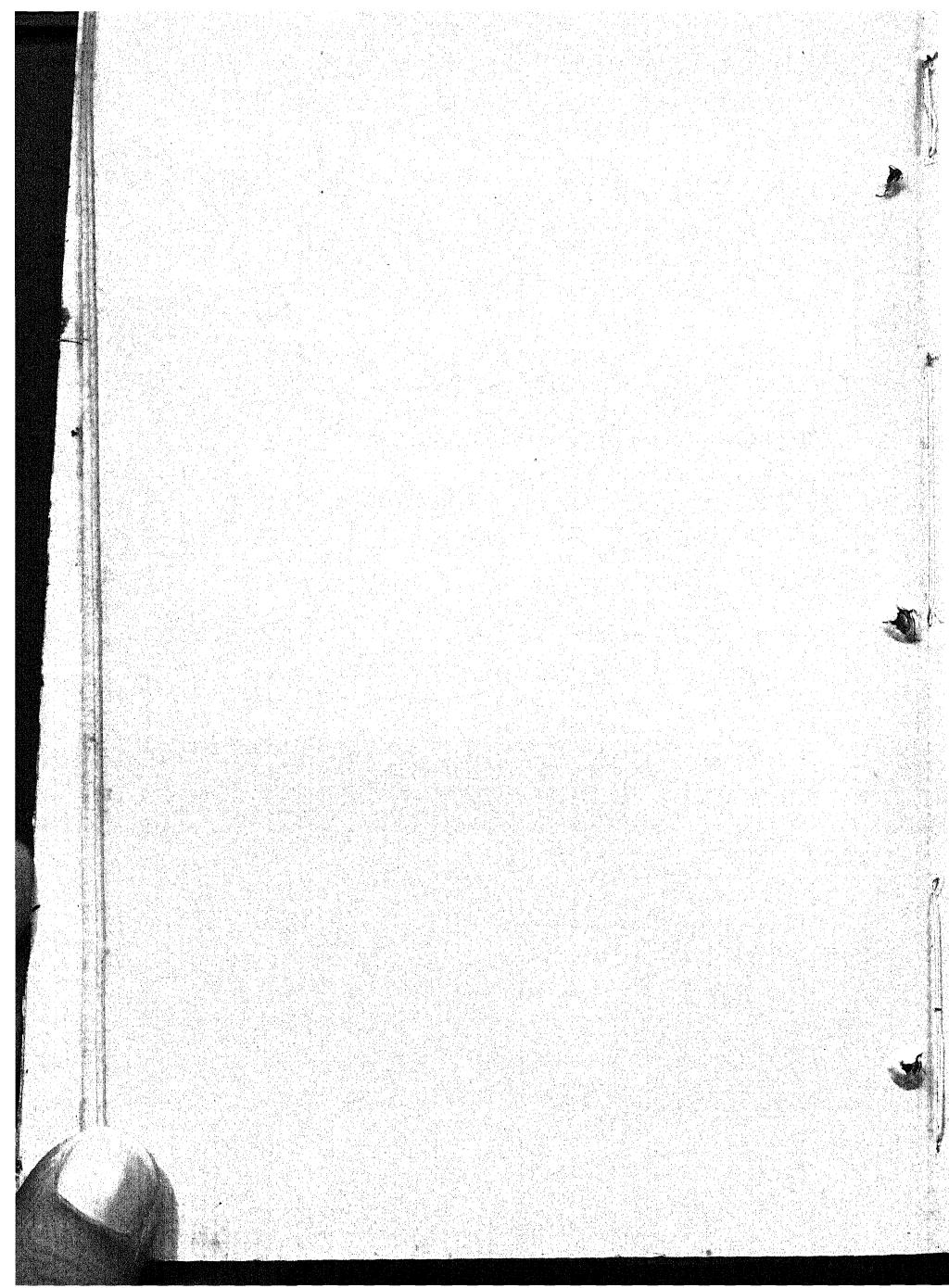
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To  
The Unseen Companion of My Journey,  
Clare Leighton



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## PREFACE

THIS little book is the fruit of a stay in India during the autumn and winter of 1930. It has the superficiality, but it may have the freshness of inexperience. A stranger in India has this advantage, that he brings with him his European standards. A resident gradually forgets the first shock of contrasts. I had, moreover, some opportunities which only a minority among European residents would value. Indians received me hospitably, and I spent much of my time, both in towns and villages, as a guest under their roofs.

Six chapters record my impressions of a journey, during the height of last year's struggle, which included the chief centres of the North. The South, to my great regret, I did not visit. The two final chapters attempt to sum up my reflections on the economic and political problems.

I would tender my thanks to the many men and women, both Indians and my fellow-countrymen, both rebels and officials, who often went to great trouble to help me with their knowledge. To my Indian hosts, who forgave my foreign ways, and opened their homes to me, I owe a debt which I can repay only with regard—Mr. Kodanda Rao in Poona, Mr. and Mrs. Ambelal Sarabhai and their family in Ahmedabad, Mr. K. N. Desai in Surat, Sir J. C. and Lady Bose in Calcutta, Mr. Shri Ram Sharma in Kirthara, U.P., Dr. and Mrs. Dharmavir in Lahore.

A word is necessary to explain the abbreviations in the references throughout the book. "Anstey" means

Mrs. Vera Anstey's invaluable *Economic Development of India*; "Linlithgow" means the Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, and "Whitley" that of the Royal Commission on Labour. My thanks are due to the editors of periodicals in which portions of some chapters appeared.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe and Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon for their kindness in reading my proofs.

LONDON,

*August, 1931.*

## CHAPTER I

### WHY INDIA FOLLOWED GANDHI

FROM my memories of a recent stay in India, a scene stands out which staged Mr. Gandhi's movement for an English onlooker in its bewildering passivity. It happened in a little country town not far from Agra. Ferozabad is a busy commercial centre. Mechanical lorries make their way through the crowded bazaar between the camels and the bullock carts. The little place lives by making glass bangles for the peasant women. Through a twelve-hour day, squatting in the infernal heat before a clay oven, without a pause for meals, men deftly convert by a turn of the wrist molten glass into bracelets, each served by a little boy who may start his brief life of labour at six years of age. Among these workers one sees no grey heads.

This stirring little town is ardently nationalist, as all commercial India is. In its main street I met a singular procession. Ten adherents of the Indian Congress party were being led to prison for the offence of picketing shops in order to enforce the boycott of British goods. On their wrists they wore steel handcuffs, and they walked within a moving fence of ropes. Behind them, in orderly files, marched a crowd of sympathisers. Some of them carried sticks : all were angry and excited. In chorus they shouted the slogans of the Congress movement, and broke into snatches of song. They numbered a full hundred or more. What force restrained them ? I could count only four Indian policemen. In any Western country, that crowd,

knowing that the nearest troops were thirty miles away, and sure of the support of every man with a brown skin, would have rescued its friends.

This scene reproduced the Indian sub-continent in little. Everywhere its millions, no longer passive and aquiescent, bent, none the less, before a force which could not have withstood their united assault. The significance of this monumental restraint is obscured by the usual description of Gandhi's followers as "extremists." The word is doubly misleading, for it suggests a minority holding the most radical views. Uncompromising the Congress may be, but to the "left" of it there are groups of young men ready for terrorist action and guerilla warfare, which wait only for the acknowledged failure of its non-violent tactics. A minority it certainly is not. In all the vast area north of Bombay it has the active support and allegiance of the mass of the Hindoo population, in the villages no less than the towns. Its few critics are inaudible in the crowd. The Moslem minority stands aloof as an organised body, but even its more conservative leaders will admit that it neither opposes Congress nor supports the Government. Its younger educated generation is wholly with Congress. A police inspector in Bombay estimated this section as a third of the whole Moslem population ; six Moslem barristers with whom I talked, put the proportion at a half. The South is relatively apathetic, less easily regimented, less willing to face the test of imprisonment, less devoted to the person of the Mahatma, but it too shares the aspirations of the more active North. At an election, if the Congress deigned to take part, it would sweep the Peninsula.

Throughout this year of agitation, Congress contrived

to pervade the entire life of India. One could never forget it. Cars in the street carried its colours. The children sang its songs. It dictated the course of trade. Bombay, one soon perceived, had two governments. To the British Government, with all its apparatus of legality and power, there still were loyal the European population, the Indian sepoys who wore its uniform, and the elder generation of the Moslem minority. The rest of Bombay had transferred its allegiance to one of His Majesty's too numerous prisoners. In Mahatma Gandhi's name Congress ruled this city. Its lightest nod was obeyed. It could fill the streets, when it pleased, and as often as it pleased, with tens of thousands of men and women, who shouted its watchwords. It could with a word close the shutters of every shop in the bazaar. When it proclaimed a *hartal* (a day of mourning), which it did all but every week, by way of protest against some act of the other government, silence descended upon the streets, and even the factories closed their doors. Only with its printed permit on a scrap of coloured paper, dare a driver urge his bullocks and his bales past its uniformed sentries, who kept watch, day and night, in every lane and alley of the business quarter. They had their guardrooms. Their inspectors entered every warehouse and shop, and watched every cotton-press. They would even confiscate forbidden goods, which a merchant had tried to smuggle past their patrols. Every day began with its public ritual. The city prayed and sang. At dawn and even before it, from every street there issued a little procession of white-robed figures. All wore the home-spun costume of *kadi*, which is the symbol of India's resolve to provide for her own needs. The men had on their heads the white Gandhi cap. A few

had Indian drums or triangles ; all sang. This movement could talk English to the educated few : it had its vernacular press for those who could read only their mother-tongue ; but the unlettered mass knew by heart its numberless rhymed songs and ballads, which extolled its leader, called for a boycott of British goods, and proclaimed its vow to win liberty or die. These little bands numbered ten or twelve persons, sometimes men, sometimes children, sometimes women. They set the keynote of each day's life. You could not escape them ; you could not forget them. Every man had heard them before he entered office or shop, nor did they muffle their challenge as their songs followed the car of a British official.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This description of Bombay applies to the earlier period of the struggle. At the end of October 1930, more stringent ordinances came into force. The Congress was declared an illegal organisation : all its buildings and other property were liable to confiscation : meetings were unlawful merely because it summoned them, and all its directing committees and officials were liable to arrest. These decrees to a certain extent drove Congress underground : it no longer dominated the streets as ostentatiously as before, but the change was less marked than one might have expected. Its bulletins were still printed or manifolded on secret machines and distributed in the streets. A few volunteers, circulating through the town, could still by word of mouth collect a great crowd for a meeting, which would be duly dispersed. The severity of the repression varied with the temperament of the local officials. In the United Provinces it was relatively gentle. I saw the tricolour flag still flying in November over the late Motilal Nehru's house in Allahabad, which served as the national headquarters of Congress, and to and from this centre the local leaders and couriers from the provinces came and went undisturbed. Here and there, mildness and good-temper disarmed the local agitation. I heard of one magistrate, very popular with the people, who successfully treated the defiance of the Salt Monopoly as a joke. The local Congress leaders made salt openly, in front of his bungalow. He came out : bought some of the contraband salt : laughed at its bad quality : chaffed the bystanders, and went quietly back to his house. The crowd melted away, and no second attempt was made to defy this genial bureaucrat. On the other hand, any exceptional severity, especially if physical brutality accompanied it, usually raised the temper of the local movement and roused it to fresh daring and further sacrifices. This was not so, however, in the South. Severity does seem to have checked it in the Andhra district of Madras, where at first it was vigorous.

As the day wore on, even in the European streets one noticed that in ones and twos Indian women were seating themselves on chairs at the doors of certain shops. They all wore the graceful Indian dress, but their *sari* (the long scarf) was of orange, a colour that has in this land its heroic associations. Few entered these shops. You might catch a glimpse of the owner reading or playing chess. But if anyone attempted to enter, the lady joined her hands in supplication : she pleaded, she reasoned, and if all else failed, she would throw herself across the threshold and dare him to walk over her body. These women have been known to fling themselves in front of a car, and lie upon the ground before its wheels, until its owner yielded and took back into the shop the forbidden goods which she had bought. But these were the exceptional shops which had refused to give the pledge to sell no foreign cloth and no British goods. Most of the Indian shops gave this undertaking, and where pickets were posted, it rarely happened that an Indian purchaser tried to defy them. The picketers went in their hundreds to prison, but always there were more to take their place. It was in this readiness to suffer that the moral power of this movement resided. When thousands will go gladly to prison, tens of thousands will give money, and hundreds of thousands will obey. It reminded me, in its temper and outlook, of the militant suffrage movement in England, save that it avoided even the minor acts of violence in which these forerunners indulged. A disarmed people had instinctively adopted these tactics. It courted suffering ; it faced it, as women will, with a noble, if passive, courage. Women were the natural exponents of its gospel. Out of the seclusion of centuries they stepped at the call

of patriotism, and nothing in this astonishing movement was so surprising as their joyful devotion. If they have not yet won *Swaraj* for India, they have completed the emancipation of their own sex.

Like the Suffragists, Congress had an instinct for colour and display. The struggle was not all suffering : this movement could be gay. Its volunteers marched in its processions in military formation. With the Indian tricolour flag, the orange scarves of the women's contingents, and the white home-spun of the men, they made a bright pageant in the dazzling light. After the procession would come the mass-demonstration, which in Bombay would often gather, in the park by the seashore, as many as twenty thousand people. More sober and orderly meetings I never saw. No Western gathering was ever so silent and passive as these Indian crowds. Few stood : they squatted upon the ground, the women in one wing, the men in another, and so, motionless and silent, in regular files, they listened to speeches and songs, Rabindranath Tagore's national anthem, or the older *Bande Mataram*. The speeches were certainly what lawyers call "seditious," but they were never incitements to disorder : invariably they preached non-violence. Sedition comes near to orthodoxy when a hundred million of one's fellows agree with every word. While the speakers talked, the more devoted members of the audience, men as well as women, would take out the little hand-spindle, the *takli*, and twist it placidly and indefatigably as they listened. In official circles the dispersal by *lathi* charges of such a gathering was described as "maintaining order."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I did not myself see any of these *lathi* charges : the practice varied greatly, and while I was in Bombay, these demonstrations were

To understand why this nation, at last so nearly united, remained non-violent, one must discard all one's Western heritage. Non-violence is more than a religious tenet ; it is a racial instinct. What Gandhi has done is to reaffirm it, against the drift of Western example and teaching. India believed in it, while our forefathers were still barbarians. It has formed her conduct. It has even regulated her diet, for it will tolerate no taking of life. For the first time in her recent history India gained

tolerated. I questioned many European eye-witnesses, however, including police inspectors, and saw many photographs. I believe that with one or two possible exceptions, the meetings should have been tolerated ; the mistake lay with the higher authorities who prohibited them. Latterly all Congress meetings were forbidden, and as regularly dispersed. If they had been tolerated, there would have been no disorder, and sooner or later the audiences would have grown bored. As it was, especially in Bombay, the policy of rough dispersal moved the whole city to anger. To face the *lathi* charges became a point of honour, and in a spirit of martyrdom volunteers went out in hundreds to be beaten. They gave a display of disciplined, passive courage : we (as all India thought) of brutality. Again and again, I heard descriptions by Europeans of the beating of slight and passive youths by sturdy constables which made one feel physically sick. They did not exaggerate. I have a photograph which shows the "volunteers" squatting, motionless on the ground in their files, while from behind, the police (in this case Englishmen) rain blows upon their heads with the *lathi*—a heavy staff, which can inflict disabling bruises and wounds.

That the police, even under English officers, often meant to inflict physical punishment for disaffection I could not doubt. In Calcutta some students, witnessing from a balcony of the University the brutal beating of participants in a peaceful procession, shouted "Cowards!" Two hours later the police returned, rushed into the University under an English officer, invaded the classrooms, and beat the students indiscriminately as they sat at their desks, till the walls were spattered with blood. The University made a protest, some faint expression of official regret followed, but no punishment. I heard details of this affair from professors whose repute in the European scientific world stands high. An Indian Judge of the High Court, whose student son had been beaten, spoke with a vehemence which I wish some member of the Government could have heard. A similar affair occurred at Lahore, where the police, again under an English officer, invaded a college and beat not only students in class but the professor also. These blows were rarely mortal. The victims survive and hate. Many a terrorist has been made by a beating.

in Gandhi a leader who based himself on her silent assumptions, the beliefs that have moulded her body. She had had in her political life commanding figures before his day, but Western thought had shaped their minds. Gandhi, it is true, studied law in London ; but did anything remain with him from his Western education, save his command of our language ? When India listened to him, she heard herself thinking aloud. He has, indeed, borrowed his Nationalism from the West, but he dares to preach that it can triumph by adopting in its struggle the ancient Hindoo tactic.

With that word, however, misunderstanding begins. There are millions of Indians for whom non-violence is nothing more than a tactic which one practises because one lacks arms and the military tradition against an enemy who has both. Non-violence is, indeed, a tactic from which one expects somewhat contradictory effects. It may embarrass one's opponent, as a general strike might do, by making it impossible to conduct the normal course of administration and trade. That is its mechanical aspect, which we of the West grasp readily enough. If none obeys when we command, if no one pays taxes, or buys what we export, empire comes to an end.

But *ahimsa* (non-violence) has also a mystical meaning. One overcomes one's enemy by love—an effect hardly likely to follow from the boycott of his trade. Again, by one's own self-restraint, one awakens shame within him for his violence. In the mind of the Mahatma and his immediate followers, *ahimsa* is but part of a moral discipline through which India must pass if she would be free. The deepest conviction of the Indian tradition is that the saint who can control himself may command

the universe. Hindoo legend loved to tell of the ascetic who won the power, by his austerities, to control the stars in their courses, and bend emperors to his will. The insignificant figure of Mr. Gandhi squatting, in contemplation, on the ground with nothing but a loin-cloth to cover him, recalls to the Indian's imagination those stories of the *yogi's* greatness. In his own mind, however, the loin-cloth has another meaning. In this land where naked poverty contrasts with purple wealth, he has ranked himself with the lowest. He will wear no garment and eat no food that might divide him from the outcasts of the village. In this unfamiliar kernel of religion lies the originality of this unique movement, and one, at least, of the secrets of its power.

Men will respond even in the India of to-day to a religious appeal, undistracted by the hum of our aeroplanes and the clatter of our armoured cars. I heard from a scrupulous man of science this evidence from his own experience. He was among the Santals, a primitive aboriginal tribe of the hills, which from time immemorial has lived by hunting. The legend reached them of this saint who had arisen in the plains below. Over one sentence of his message they pondered deeply, and then with implicit obedience they acted. The saint had said, "Let the creatures of the forest have peace." They burned their bows and arrows and snares and, for the first time in uncounted centuries, took to tilling the soil.

Politics for this singular leader are a mere consequence and by-product of his ethical teaching. From his prison cell, amid the turmoil of this passionate struggle, he issued his weekly sermon. Now it enforced the duty of truth ; again it commanded literal and absolute chastity.

His disciples tried at least to follow this difficult teaching. In a gymnasium in Baroda State, organised by the Congress movement, I saw, decked with fresh flowers, an altar to the god of chastity which the young men had erected beside the parallel bars.

Indians quote the sayings of the Mahatma in a tone of loving reverence, such as one has heard only from the simplest of believing Christians when they cite their Master's words. Scarcely a shop in the Hindoo quarters of Bombay fails to exhibit his photograph. I have seen it in the wattled hut of an aboriginal tribesman so poor that he owned nothing else, save his tools and his earthen pots. It is sold by peddlers with the gaudy lithographs that portray the adventures of Krishna, and one may buy it, contrary to the law of Islam which forbids portraiture, on the steps of the great mosque at Delhi. By putting this man in prison we made him omnipresent.

This mystical doctrine of self-control, incarnated in the spare person of this all but naked saint, has given to the best among the sixty thousand who have faced the privations of Indian jails, the strength to withstand. One face from among them stands out in my memory : its owner, a lawyer, may have been too fine a spirit to be typical, but his thinking was characteristic of Gandhi's movement. He had been the chief speaker at one of the few meetings (near Meerut) which were dispersed by rifle fire. He had tried to calm an angry crowd, and had stationed a cordon of volunteers round the police station to protect it. He was, none the less, arrested, beaten by the police, and shot by one of them, while under arrest, at close range. The police kicked him as he lay on the ground, and five hours passed before he received

first-aid. His right arm had to be amputated, and a day after the operation he was carried from hospital to prison. He told the story without a trace of bitterness, his face lit by a triumphant serenity. "In prison," he went on, "my friends and I were happy and even gay. 'Now we know,' one said to the other, 'that India is free. We have kept the master's sayings. We have faced even the rifle, and refrained from anger.'" As one looked at the face of the man, proud in its gentleness, one ceased to pity the mutilated arm.

When one grasped the psychological meaning of this movement, as Gandhi conceived it, it became easier to understand his uncompromising stiffness in the negotiations of mid-summer, 1930. He was in no hurry to achieve an immediate political end. The immense volume of pain, anxiety, and material loss which the struggle had brought with it counted for little in his mind in the balance against the mental gain. It was, as he saw it, a preparation for freedom. The nation which resists subjection, though it be without violence, achieves liberation in its own soul. It was against the degradation of a servile aquiescence in foreign rule that he rebelled. His methods were designed to make the continuance of British rule impossible, but even more, to train the people of India in self-respect. These methods, accordingly, form a series of steps, each more difficult but also more effective than the last.

**T**HIS ladder of difficulty began, several years ago, with the revival of hand spinning. One can imagine nothing, from our Western standpoint, more fantastic. To spin had become for Gandhi's devout followers a species of ritual. One came down to breakfast to discover one's host, a doctor with a Scottish training, squatting at his antiquated hand spindle, bent on completing his obligatory hour's task. In the train a lady will take a folding spindle from a case, assemble it, and calmly set to work. These were the oddities of a most original movement. It is of more consequence that in many a village one might see the peasants, when field work was at a standstill, turning the spinning wheel as they squatted in the shade. This revival of a hopelessly uneconomic craft signified, first of all, Gandhi's revolt against our mechanical civilisation—for he is a rebel, reminiscent of Tolstoy rather than of Ruskin, against Western machines no less than the British flag. It was, secondly, a way of freeing India from her tribute to Lancashire.

But chiefly it is a simple device to help the villager in his inconceivable poverty. Save where there is canal irrigation, the Indian climate and the traditional methods of husbandry make it impossible for the peasant to labour in the fields for more than seven or eight months of the year. He may do a little carting, if he has sturdy bullocks. He may work in a mill, if he is in reach of a textile centre. But the great mass is condemned to helpless and compulsory idleness through one-third of the year.

With capital one might create village industries, but it is scarce. A spinning wheel may be made at home, or bought for a couple of shillings, and the marketing of the

yarn calls for no organisation : one has only to take it to the weaver, who in most villages still contrives, half-starved and loaded with debt, to compete with the mills.

True, one can earn by a day's spinning only one or two pence. But when a field labourer's day commands, from dawn to dusk, a wage that ranges from fivepence to twopence halfpenny, and no field work is to be had, is a penny to be despised ? There is to-day a demand for hand-woven cloth, for patriotism favours it. Even the Indian official, who must wear European cloth at his desk, will change in the evening into coarse homespun. One can help the Indian village and deal a blow at Lancashire as one dons it.

One enters the zone of sedition with the next method, the attempt to smash the Government's salt monopoly. It is the kindergarten stage of revolution. One smiles at the notion that the King-Emperor can be unseated by boiling sea water in a kettle. Even this mild activity is, however, an attack on the revenue, and it landed thousands of Indians in prison, including Gandhi himself. He knew his public. He staged his salt-making as a quasi-religious pilgrimage. Its pathetic innocence helped this law-abiding people to take the first plunge into disobedience. Here, too, one could argue that one was helping the impoverished peasant, and the protectionist motive made itself felt. Why import salt from Liverpool, if one can evaporate salt water by the sun's heat on the shores of Bombay and Bengal ? I suspect the play of a traditional association. Salt in the ancient world was a magical substance. If one ate a man's salt one dare not betray him. To eat an overlord's salt was always to incur a debt of loyalty. The salt *gabelle*, on the eve of the French

Revolution, roused the same passions. It is a bad tax, as all indirect taxes are, and it greatly enhances the cost of what is often the one relish in the miserable diet of the labourer. To be sure, it works out at no more than  $3\frac{1}{2}d.$  per head per annum, but even that may mean four days work in the year for the head of a labouring family.

With the attack on the drink monopoly one reaches a subversive method of greater potency. From this monopoly the provincial governments derive in some instances as much as a quarter of their revenue. Custom, save among the more degraded castes, and the teaching of both the great religions of India unite to forbid the use of alcohol. The Congress had Indian morality behind it when it organised a boycott, through peaceful picketing, of the Government's toddy shops. To a great extent it gained its end. In Bombay the usual annual auction of licenses collapsed, and they were sold by private treaty for half the usual figure. In many towns the toddy shops were closed; no Indian dare brave the condemnation of his fellows by entering them. In some places the all-powerful caste organisations re-enforced the prohibition of the Congress. The Government was at length driven to permit the sale of spirits anywhere and anyhow, without the usual restrictions—a sure sign of demoralisation. The most interesting aspect of this agitation was the part which women played in it. I have seen these slight figures, accustomed to a life of ease, take their place for eight hours as pickets over the back door of a liquor shop, beside an open drain, amid the unspeakable degradation of the slums.

Reluctantly, since it contradicted his gospel of love, Gandhi consented to the next method—the boycott of

foreign goods, and especially of British cloth. It was organised with enthusiasm all over India, and though the motive—if one could believe the Mahatma's intimates—may have been rather to help Indian industry than to injure England, one was made to feel the popular resentment, when the passengers in a passing omnibus shouted "Boycott!" as they caught sight of one's white skin.

Congress began by exacting pledges from merchants and retailers that they would neither import these forbidden goods, nor sell the stocks which they already had in store. To impose such a veto with general success was an amazing proof of the solidarity of Indian society. The test of the authority of Congress came while I was in Bombay. The merchants who import cotton piece goods had ceased for six months to buy foreign cloth, but they had in stock quantities worth £3½ millions, suited only to the Indian market. They could not be re-exported, and were deteriorating in the warehouses. The merchants met, and in a somewhat apologetic resolution, declared that they would sell these stocks, and thereafter buy no more. The Congress refused to compromise, and as the event showed, it did not over-estimate its strength. Hundreds of its women volunteers marched down to the wholesale market. They would picket every shop and office. Some of them declared that they would go on hunger strike, until the merchants withdrew their resolution. A meeting was held at which some of the leading Nationalist orators spoke. And then, even before the pickets had taken up their stations, the struggle was over. The clerks and porters refused to open the warehouse shutters, or to handle one bale of the cloth. Congress had won.

The figures of the other Customs service, the British

Board of Trade, showed clearly enough the effects of this boycott. By the autumn of 1930 imports of cotton piece goods had dropped to between a third and a fourth of what they were in the same months of the previous year. Imported cigarettes had fallen in value to a sixth of the old figure. Sixteen British owned mills in Bombay had been closed down, and thirty-two thousand textile workers were idle. There were casualties in this bloodless warfare. On the other hand, the Indian-owned mills which had given the pledge were often working double shifts, and were adapting their machinery to spin the finer counts, which hitherto had been imported.

If India is difficult to understand, it is because her idealism belongs to her own tradition, while the heavier clay of human nature is of one texture the world over. Inextricably they mingled in this movement. Gandhi may have thought out these methods in order to brace the Indian character for freedom, but in fact all of them, save the "dry" campaign, had their roots in economic nationalism. India already enjoys a tariff which gives to her industries a moderate degree of protection, even against British imports. But the cry is everywhere for high protection, both to encourage existing and to foster new industries.

In addition to the reasons of self-respect and wounded pride which all Indians have behind their nationalism, the growing industrial group, especially strong in Bombay, found its account in a movement which boycotted foreign goods. These people may be conservatives by temper

and interest ; yet by generous gifts of money, and sometimes by taking personal risks, they supported an agitation which may end by kindling a revolutionary flame. Some of the wives and daughters of these Bombay millionaires even went to prison.

This demand for protection has mass support, because India suffers from chronic unemployment and grinding poverty among the educated class. To tens of thousands of young men no door opens as they leave school or college, and they are easily induced to believe that if India controlled her own economic life, there would be room for them in her industries or her banks, her railways or her public services—which may be true, though few of them have had a training which could fit them for productive work.

This economic discontent was increased by the action of the Indian Government in raising the exchange value of the rupee from 1s. 4d. to 1s. 6d. Like Mr. Churchill's raising of the sterling exchange, it had the effect of favouring the creditor and *rentier* class, while it encouraged imports and penalised exports. In short it favoured, on the whole, British as against Indian interests. It increased by 11 per cent. every debt which India owed to England.

But one might continue indefinitely the catalogue of economic grievances which have ranged Indian capitalists and merchants almost solidly on the side of the Congress, in spite of the indescribable disturbance which its agitation has caused to the whole mechanism of credit and trade. They bowed submissively to its decrees, even when it closed their mills and shops and virtually confiscated their stocks of imported goods, confident that the gains of the future would compensate for the losses of to-day.

If the action of the Indian Government in establishing a gold standard with the rupee fixed at an unduly high value offended the mercantile class, another phase of its monetary policy struck at the peasants. It de-monetised silver, threw its reserves on the market, and so in some five years helped to bring the value of silver tumbling to a half of what it had been. That halved the peasant's credit. There are no banks in the Indian village : there are few even in the towns. In this primitive society men hoard their savings. Their wives carry them upon their persons, chiefly as silver ornaments, and on the security of these, the peasant borrows. This drop in the value of silver halved the savings of the village, such as they are, and lowered its barriers against famine.

For background, this movement of economic discontent had the world depression. The catastrophic drop in the prices of agricultural produce explained the wave of revolution which swept over South America. On India it fell with the fury of a tropical tornado. The peasant saw the value of his crops tumbling, from one harvest to another, to one-half or a third. On the Ganges plain, wheat in three years fell from seven, through four, to two rupees per *maund* (eighty-two lbs.). The jute grower of Bengal had the same experience. The village was ruined. Its savings were halved. Its crops would fetch barely half the wonted price. But its debts, its taxes and its rents stood stolidly at the old figure. Life, it knew not why, had suddenly become impossible. If it paid, it must starve ; if it did not pay, it must turn rebel. While it hesitated, the voice that it revered spoke the word it wished to hear. Mr. Gandhi proclaimed the patriotic duty of tax-resistance. In a sense it was an easy

duty; the village could not pay. So it was that the world's mysterious dealings with gold and the price level suddenly swung these silent, apathetic villages into politics, ranged them behind Congress as its staunchest supporters, and over wide areas of Northern India prepared them for the final phase of the struggle—the refusal to pay taxes. It was never general, for it did not touch the South, or the Punjab. It began in Gujarat (Bombay Presidency) with a refusal to pay land revenue. In Bihar and parts of Bengal the police rate was resisted. In the United Provinces, in the later phases of the struggle, the peasants resisted both rent and tax. While this went on, the headmen and other local officials were summoned to lay down their offices, and in countless villages they responded. In some districts the peasants defied the regulations which conserve the forests. But the struggle in the villages merits a fuller narrative.

The unique personality of Mr. Gandhi played a decisive part in firing India for this struggle. Without him she could not have achieved this spectacular unity. He touched, as no leader before him had ever done, her traditional springs of emotion. He gave her effort the solemnity of a high moral endeavour, and appealed to a faith that had its root in racial instinct. But without this material background, the nationalist movement would never have attained these dimensions, would never have roused the villages, nor enlisted the capitalists in its ranks. It was easy to induce shop-keepers to put up their shutters for a *hartal*: they sold little on other days. It was easy to refrain from buying foreign goods: one lacked the means to buy. Above all, it was satisfactory that patriotism agreed with one's empty purse in rejecting the tax-gatherer's

demands. Finally, among the legion of unemployed young men the movement found it easy to recruit its volunteers. To say this is not to belittle it, or its leader, nor to question its passionate sincerity. It is to recognise the play of economic causes in making history.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The MacMillan Committee's Report (p. 92) has some interesting reflections on this subject, though it does not specifically mention India. "A study of history," it writes, "would, we believe, confirm the opinion that it is in changes in the level of prices, and in the consequential alteration in the position of debtors and creditors, entrepreneurs and workers, peasants and the tax-gatherer, that the main secret of social trouble is to be found."

The fall in wholesale prices was rather more rapid in India than elsewhere. In the first year of the slump (i.e. up to September 1930) wholesale prices had fallen 20 per cent. in India, as against a fall of 13 per cent. in the United States and 15 per cent. in the United Kingdom. By July 1931, the Calcutta index, which stood at 98, showed a fall over two years of over 30 per cent. This index, weighted, presumably, to suit the commerce and industry of a great city, underestimates the force of the drop in the villages of Bengal, where nothing matters but jute and rice : they fell, roughly, by a half.

An appreciation of gold so sudden and violent as this, transforms the whole relationship of a debtor country to the outer world. If this level of prices should become permanent (and it may fall further), then India's indebtedness to Great Britain has been increased in two years by a third. The Imperial creditor, without any fresh service, has had his tribute raised in the same proportion. This is, moreover, only the last step in a long process. The deliberate raising of the rupee exchange had already (in 1925) raised it by about 11 per cent. A fluctuating measure of value, mischievous enough in our own home life, works untold oppression in our indebted dependencies.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VILLAGE DEFIES THE EMPIRE

FIVE days spent among the villages of Gujarat stand out among the most memorable, and yet the most painful, of my stay in India. Try as one may to think calmly and write quietly about these experiences, they dramatise themselves. The Nationalist movement was here at its height, and one realised the extremes of devotion and endurance of which it is capable. The Indian Government was here at its worst, struggling, as it was bound to do, to collect the taxes which the peasants refused, and using or tolerating, in the process, a physical brutality and a contempt for the forms of the law which I should have refused to credit, without the evidence of my senses.

The Indian Police presents to the observer aspects which differ according to the position he occupies. Seen from above, by a member of the ruling race, it is a model of loyalty and reliability, zealous in its dealings with crime and disaffection. Seen from below, with Indian eyes (and during these five days I lived entirely with Indians), it is the ugliest blot on our administrative system. That it is all but universally corrupt, given to taking and extorting bribes, even Englishmen, when they talk frankly, will admit, and this is true of the Indian officers as well as of the men. To find its arbitrary brutality credible, one must see it in historical perspective.

We trod on the heels of earlier conquerors, and our administration, when it works through Indian agents, is

a compromise between the traditions which the Moghuls left behind them, and our own European standards. Vigilance is not easy, for a hedge of native subordinates stands between the British official and the masses, whom an age-long training under many despots had taught to suffer silently. I found in the very correct Oxford *History of India*, by the late Vincent A. Smith, C.I.E., the statement on p. 86, that, during his own official career he had found it difficult to prevent the Indian police from using torture to extract evidence, while on p. 540, a passage occurs which seems to imply that beating is, or recently was, a not unusual method in extracting taxes.

The refusal of taxes represents the climax in Gandhi's graduated scale of resistance. It would, if it became general, bring British rule to an early end. But from those who practise it, it requires a readiness to brave material ruin. The Indian Government, when it confiscates the land or attaches the moveable property of a tax-resister, has no nice scruples. It appropriates, many times over, the value of what one owes, and a man who refuses his land-tax must be prepared to lose his all. In Gujarat, land worth from 700 to 1,000 rupees per *bigha* ( $1\frac{3}{4}$  acres) was offered for sale at one or two rupees, and it happened that two new motor pumps used for irrigation, each worth Rs.5,000, were sold at Rs.16 and Rs.65 to cover taxes of these amounts. That thousands of peasants in Gujarat were willing to face these risks is an amazing proof of their determination.

**G**UJARAT, for several reasons, was chosen as the pioneer of this formidable but costly method of passive resistance. It stands out, with parts of the Punjab, as the most prosperous region of rural India. Most of the peasants own their fields, and, though they are a singularly gentle race, they have something of the self-reliance and stubbornness of the typical yeoman. There is less illiteracy than elsewhere. Many of these villagers have seen the world, for on the coast they include some castes of hereditary sailors, and others go in large numbers to South Africa, and send home large sums (I heard of £150 in one year) to their families. The land is fertile, and will grow, under irrigation, good cotton, tobacco and sugar, as well as cereals. Though the holdings range only from ten to twenty acres, one is startled by the evidences of prosperity.

Instead of the usual mud-huts, one grows used to villages of brick houses, which are often of two storeys, with their door-posts elaborately carved, while the outer walls are decorated with naive and amusing paintings. Ancient and modern subjects mingle in the most natural way. One house will display the adventures of Krishna : its neighbour will show a railway train. Their cattle are the pride of these farmers, and one has to go to Gujarat to realise what a stately and beautiful animal the Indian bullock can be. But this prosperity is rapidly becoming a memory, for here, too, the catastrophic fall in prices has brought hardship, and an acute sense of grievance.

These villages, one must explain, had been for years under the influence of Gandhi and his disciples. In several of them I saw the permanent centres (most of

them closed and confiscated) which he had established—here a school for untouchable boys (still open), there a sort of monastery-school created to help a backward, aboriginal tribe, and again a technical school which taught spinning and weaving. Two years ago the Bardoli district went through the first Indian experiment in tax-resistance, not from political motives, but as a protest against an excessive assessment : it stood its ground stoutly and won. The assessment was reduced.

Finally, Gandhi, everywhere hero and saint, is in this region the intimate neighbour and teacher of the villagers. He has often toured through it, preaching to vast, mesmerised crowds, and here he chose to be arrested on his march to the sea. He is devotedly loved, and so, too, is his lieutenant, Vallabhai Patel. I asked a group of forty or fifty villagers why they faced these risks and hardships. The women, as usual, answered first, and voiced this feeling of personal loyalty, "We'll pay no taxes," they said, "till Mahatmaji and Vallabhai tell us to pay." Then the men, slowly collecting their thoughts, voiced their economic grievance : "We won't pay because the tax is unjust," and they went on to explain that at present prices they make, as owner-cultivators, less than a day-labourer's wage. Finally, they added : "We're doing it to win *Swaraj*."

**W**HAT they were doing almost passes belief. Many villages were totally abandoned. One saw through the windows that every stick of property had been removed. In the silent street nothing moved till a monkey skipped from a roof across the

lane of blinding sunlight. Here and there one met a peasant who had returned for the day to plough his fields, or a priest who guarded his temple. For the rest, the people had moved across the frontier of British India into the territory of independent Baroda. There, close to the boundary, they camped in shelters of matting and palm leaves, the ground cumbered with their chests and their beds, their churns and the great mud-coated baskets that hold their grain. In the hot autumn days life was just tolerable for hardy villagers in these conditions, but the rains would test their determination.

How many people there were in these camps, of which I saw three, one could only guess, perhaps three, perhaps five thousand. Even in Baroda, however, these refugees were not always safe. Their camps had more than once been invaded, and the Gaekwar's territory violated by armed British-Indian police, under an Indian official, who beat with their *lathis*, not only their own people but the Gaekwar's subjects also.

The answer to this movement was ruthless, and the English official who directed it strained the forms of law to breaking point. Land-tax is payable in two instalments, after the chief harvests, usually in January and May, but the date (since harvests may be late) can be varied. Of this merciful provision of the Code the Commissioner took advantage to anticipate the date of the instalment which became payable in January 1931. He issued his demand notes in October 1930, and already in October the police, in the effort to collect the following year's tax, began to beat peasants who had duly paid their two instalments for the current year. The date, as the Commissioner told me, was anticipated, because it was known

that the peasants intended to resist, and it was important to realise the tax before they could sell or remove their crops. He added that a man would not be harassed whose sole reason for non-payment was genuine poverty. In short, it was a method of taking the offensive against villages which had not yet broken the law or challenged the Government : they were known to be disaffected, and the remedy of intimidation was applied.

To find purchasers for the confiscated land and buffaloes was not easy. This population was amazingly solid. There are few Moslems in Gujarat, and the Hindoos are knit together by a close caste organisation. In the Kaira district most of the peasant-owners are Patidars. This caste, after two members had given way under a merciless beating, and paid their tax three months before it was normally due, held a meeting, and fined them heavily for their weakness : it then announced that anyone who yielded in future would be fined Rs.101 (about £7 15s.). The penalty for a refusal to pay that fine would be the dread fate of an out-caste.

In such a society no self-respecting Hindoo will buy confiscated land. But in this Kaira district there are low-caste aborigines, known as Barias, whom the Indian Census classes as a "criminal tribe." They are landless labourers : they habitually carry murderous bill-hooks, and after a recent outbreak of brigandage are required to report themselves twice a day to the village policeman. Perhaps these troublesome but unfortunate people would buy, if the price were low enough ? I am bound to report the Commissioner's motive, as he stated it to me : he wished to use the occasion to raise these poor people in the social scale. Motives one cannot judge, but one may

predict effects. Should this strategy succeed, it would drive a wedge into this solid Hindoo society, and by dividing, ease the task of the ruler. He might get the revenue at the cost of an unending village feud.

A STRATEGY such as this may be devised by cold English brains : it deteriorates when hot Indian hands carry it out. The responsible Indian official, the sub-collector (Mamlatdar) of the Borsod Taluka, a University graduate and a person of unusual energy, interpreted it in his own way. He acted like a Russian Communist engaged in carrying the class war into the villages. He went round them, collected the Barias and made them a speech varying but little, which five of these Barias from different villages repeated to me. He told them that now was the time for vengeance, that the Patidars had oppressed them in the past, but that if any of them owed a debt to a Patidar he had only to come into court and declare himself bankrupt : "I will be there and see you through. If he demands his debt, beat him, cut him in pieces. Beat any man who wears a white [Gandhi] cap." There followed an invitation to buy their confiscated land for one or two rupees an acre. One witness quoted his advice to burn their houses, and another cited a police sub-inspector to the same effect. I am told (though it occurred after my visit) that some houses were in fact burned.

This strategy was reinforced with punitive expeditions by the police to the disaffected villages, often with this official at their head. These police are partly an armed emergency force carrying rifles ; the men have no numbers

on their uniforms, as I discovered when one of them, without a shadow of right, tried to bar my way along the high road with his fixed bayonet. One cannot identify a man who misbehaves.

The usual procedure, on entering a village, was to round up the few men who might have remained in it, or had returned to do a day's labour in the fields. These were beaten indiscriminately, often in the official's presence, and sometimes he used his own stick to further the work of justice. Some serious injuries were inflicted. I saw a man with a dangling, broken arm, and another with his thumb-joint cut to the bone. A woman had a badly bruised and swollen face. I heard of other more serious cases which had gone to a distant hospital.

As I went about from village to village, covering, however, only part of the area, forty-five peasants gave me their personal stories of recent beating, and in all but two of these cases I saw their injuries. A few had bruises all over their bodies, some from *lathis* and some from the butt ends of rifles. Sometimes the motive of the beating was to extract the tax on the spot, and occasionally this method succeeded. But often the victim was not himself a taxpayer. In Bardoli a certain police officer specialised in compelling any chance man whom he could catch to pay the tax of someone else who was out of reach. The victim would be dismissed with a kick or a blow, and told to collect the money from his neighbour.

Often the motive was simply to terrorise. In two cases a man was beaten till he took off his Gandhi cap. In one village, where the police tore down the national flags from the trees and the houses, it may have been this display of the Congress standard which led them to beat

eight persons. In one case, a man who had an ugly bruise on his body from a rifle butt, and twelve bruises on his body from the *lathi*, was told to salute the police seven times. He saluted and they stopped beating.

THE reader thinks, perhaps, that I was misled by subtle Indians. Well, the Commissioner was good enough to accompany me to one village: he, too, saw the wounds and bruises, and his cross-questioning did not shake the peasants. He expressed doubts only in one case out of nine—that of a girl whom modesty forbade to show her injuries. Moreover, I met two of these Indian officials, and witnessed their bullying manners. One of them in my presence ordered a most wanton and needless *lathi* charge against an unoffending crowd of curious spectators which fled at the first command; but still the *lathi* blows fell. I gave my evidence in writing, with names and dates, both to the local officials and to the higher authorities at Delhi.

Up to a point one can trust one's own eyes. I saw, for example, at the Borsod Jail, eighteen political prisoners, as yet unconvicted, who had to spend their days and nights in a cage, with a front of iron bars like a den in the Zoo, which measured about thirty feet square.<sup>1</sup> It was

<sup>1</sup> This was a country "lock-up" for unconvicted prisoners. The men and women sentenced for participation in the Congress movement were so numerous—there were approximately 60,000 convictions—that they had to be accommodated largely in improvised prisons. They were classified in three classes, A, B, C, according to the magistrate's impression of their social standing. This division, odious in itself, was carried out with singular caprice. Three of Mr. Gandhi's sons were sent to prison, each (as one of them told me) in a

the warder who told me that they are let out, only once a day for three-quarters of an hour, to wash and visit the latrine. One of them, without books or work, had spent six weeks in this cage, and this the warder could not deny. When another prisoner told me that he himself and two others had been beaten in jail in the Mamlatdar's presence, perhaps I should have rebuked him for traducing one of His Majesty's officials, but in that House of Mercy I was dumb.

different class. The theory of the higher authorities, as the late Inspector of Prisons in Bengal explained it to me, was that those sentenced to Class C were of the coolie class, and that the conditions provided for them were those to which this class is accustomed in India. In fact, very few, if any of them, were of this class. I visited the prison at Dum-Dum, near Calcutta, formerly an arsenal. The situation is malarious, and the prison was infested with mosquitoes. The officers in charge (Indians) seemed to me exceptionally reasonable men, who would listen to complaints, and do all in their power to remedy grievances. Under harsh officers life in this overcrowded prison would have been literally unendurable. The prisoners fortunately had each other's society : there was no solitary confinement. Even so, the conditions of Class C were shocking. The prisoners were all, or nearly all, of the educated class, and most of them spoke English. The majority were of the clerk class, but there were lawyers and doctors among them. The whole place was dirty, shockingly ill-ventilated, and overrun with parasites. The diet was coarse, monotonous and insufficient. No soap whatever was provided, nor oil (which Indians habitually use), nor could such things be obtained from outside. Many prisoners in consequence contracted skin disease. For Class C there were no mosquito nets, though these were provided for Classes A and B. As a result a large proportion of the prisoners had malaria. The hospital was so overcrowded that there were barely six inches between the beds.

### CHAPTER III

#### HOW THE VILLAGE LIVES

ONE may reach India in these days by aeroplane, but the indispensable vehicle in which to approach a village is the time-machine of Mr. Wells' romance, and its engines must be reversed some thirty centuries. In the shade of a wall a potter, squatting on the ground, spins his wheel by hand and deftly turns elegant shapes of clay that were fashionable in the Bronze Age. Inside a doorway, marked with the print of stencilled hands to avert pestilence and ill-luck, a woman, squatting, turns her spindle. In an open space other figures are crushing sugar-cane in a hand-mill. Against its creaking one hears at a little distance the rhythmical twang of the bow used to card the fleecy cotton. A humble little shrine, which contains a shapeless stone painted with red ochre, fails somehow to persuade me of God's goodness.

The village cultivates much as our forefathers did when Stonehenge was erected. The fields are often mere garden plots of half an acre or less : one could not use a machine in them if one possessed it. Much of the land is wasted in raised boundary ridges. The plough has hardly changed since the mysterious people of the Indus Valley built up a civilisation contemporary with that of Ur of the Chaldees. It is a dwarf instrument of wood, with an iron point ; one guides it with the right hand, and at seed time the left hand may trickle the grain into a drill of bamboo. One threshes by treading out the grain with bullocks, and winnows by tossing it in the air.

Irrigation is usual, but only a few favoured regions have a canal system. If one is prosperous, and the water is not too far below the soil level, one may construct a Persian well. In the villages to which I now invite the reader, we had to be content with a much more primitive device. A pair of bullocks ran down an inclined plane, dragging by a rope, over a grooved wheel, a skin of water from the depths of the well ; when it reached the top, the driver laboriously poured its contents into the channels. At harvest-time India knows nothing of the scythe : the people squat on the ground and cut the grain with a tiny sickle. I was curious to discover how much labour these childlike operations involved, and reckoned it out with a group of peasants. For wheat ten ploughings were necessary, and even then the soil was only scratched four inches deep ; on the other hand, one must record that a weed is rarely seen in an Indian field. To raise an acre of wheat one must spend fifteen days in giving it three waterings. It will take eight men and women from dawn to dusk to reap it.

All told, we reckoned that it cost the labour of one man for forty days to raise an acre of wheat. I should have distrusted this incredible calculation, had I not afterward found the same total in an official publication. One begins with this figure to probe the secret of India's poverty. She must waste her man power by spending forty days to attain a result which a modern farmer would achieve with the aid of machinery in rather less than a day. That is one's first reflection, but the thought which follows it is still more disconcerting. These peasants would gain nothing, save leisure, if one could present them with modern machines. Their holdings range from

five to ten acres, and they have nothing else to occupy their time if they should learn to economise it. Trudging through these fields, the baffling problem of over-population stares one in the face, even before one reaches the huddled huts of the village.

On the way through the fields to the first of these villages—its obscure name is Kishanpur, and it lies in the great plain between Jumna and Ganges, about thirty miles from the once royal Moghul city of Agra and the graces of the Taj Mahal—I met one of the landlords of the district. Though his clothes were rather shabby, he carried himself with distinction, as became a man of power. We fell into talk, and I asked him whether the *zemindars* in this part of the United Provinces were still the descendants of the old feudal gentry who used to hold the land under the Moghul Emperors, on a military tenure, pledged to lead so many horse and foot into the field when their sovereign summoned them. No, he told me—most of those old families were extinct ; he and most of his fellows had bought the land from embarrassed grandees. They held it under an arrangement which prevails over a great part of northern and central India : they draw a rent from the peasants, and must pay 45 per cent. of it to the government as land tax.

My eye fell on a pair of white bullocks, as we talked, trotting down the inclined plane of a well. Who dug these wells ? The peasants themselves dug them before the memory of the oldest inhabitant, and they also (as I learned in answer to a further question) had erected their huts. What, then, did the *zemindar* contribute to the resources of the village ? What outlay of capital did his rent represent ? I asked him, bluntly, whether in return

for this tribute, he performed any social or economic service whatever. "No," he replied, with a frankness which disarmed : "We're just filling our bellies as everyone else does. We bought our rights and owe no obligation to the peasants."

Round the drinking well of the village I counted five heaps of refuse and dung. In the narrow lanes between the mud walls, there was garbage and stagnant filth. The huts were the usual boxes of mud, without windows or chimneys; on their flat roofs the people sleep in summer. The open space round which the hamlet clustered was dominated by a shady tree. Under it I took my seat on the bamboo bed which the headman had carried out for my use. In a few minutes the whole male population was squatting round me and answering my questions.

Three direct inquiries sufficed to outline the condition of this village : the rest was detail. Everyone was in debt ; no one could read : not one of the children attended school. I realised, as the villagers helped me to fill in this sketch, that the entire economic life of the village is based on a pervasive system of debt, from which a man never escapes. To a heritage of debt every baby is born : loaded with debt the emaciated corpse is carried to the funeral pyre. The usual rate of interest is  $37\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. The *bania* (moneylender) makes full use of compound interest, and these debts multiply like the bacilli in the dung heaps. When a milch buffalo dies, the peasant obtains another from the moneylender, on the understanding that all the butter (*ghee*) goes to this universal provider, who is also the universal consumer ; only the sour buttermilk remains in the village.

The crops, raised with so much painful labour, found

their way to the *bania's* capacious granary. He took the harvest in payment for past debts, and then lent it back to the village as a new debt. In these two transactions it was never valued at the same price : grain is worth more when a *bania* gives than when he receives. The wheat, I should add, never came back when once it had left the threshing floor, for this village ate wheaten bread only at weddings. Millet and *gram* (the grain used for horses in India) are its daily diet, and it eats little else. The children, who never taste milk after they are weaned, were shadows nourished on debts. Most of them had some disease of the eyes or the skin. Many had the swollen belly that indicates a spleen enlarged by malaria, and the limbs of most of them looked like dark sticks fitted to joints.

The mention of weddings set me inquiring what the village spent on these festivities. It would borrow £14 to celebrate them, doubtless a shocking extravagance for people whose daily income was round about threepence. But weddings were infrequent : the village is becoming too poor to marry, and the one item of good news which I carried away from this talk was that its population is declining. Four stalwart young men stood up and assured me that though they were eager to marry, their families could not afford to help them, although, according to the sentiment of old-world India, it is the worst of social sins to delay the duty of continuing one's race. Marriages, in this region, are always within the caste, but outside the village ; and of late the scarcity of women has introduced the custom (to put it brutally) of buying wives. "Our religion," as a priest said to me in a neighbouring village, "is no more, for we have been forced by poverty to sell our daughters."

At this point I noticed a ripple of laughter spreading through the ranks, and I asked what had amused them. "We're laughing," they said, "because we never before met a *sahib* who asked such questions as these." (*Sahib* is the title of respect which Indians give to Englishmen.) "The Collector *Sahib* [that is, the magistrate and administrative official] never asks us what we eat." "Oh!" said I, "and what sort of questions does he ask you?" "He asks us about crime in the village, and whether there have been any robberies lately." That struck me as the shrewdest criticism, unconscious though it was, that I heard from Indians, of this capable, scrupulously honest, but unsympathetic bureaucracy.

Another man was standing up, to attract my attention. He tore off the long length of cotton cloth which Indians drape round their persons: the dark frame beneath it was gaunt. "Look, *sahib*, this is the only shred of clothing I possess. I have no change." It was tattered and threadbare. I asked him what he earned. He had no land, but worked as a labourer on the railway, a state concern, at a wage of sixpence for a day of ten hours, without a break for meals. I gathered that his neighbours envied this owner of one shirt, who kept himself, a wife, and two children on sixpence a day. One made less, they assured me, when one had land, for one had rent to pay. The rent would soon be due, and they did not know what they would do when the *zemindar* demanded it.

But it was time to walk back to the village of my friend and host—a Brahmin, and a man of exceptional ability, who after some years spent at the University and in teaching, had returned to live as a peasant in his native

village ; indeed, it was already dark. He asked if anyone could lend us a lantern to light us over the fields. There was not one in Kishanpur.

**A**s my stay among these villages went on, I was to learn much more of how they lived. I witnessed the dumb misery of a father, as fever struck his child down, far from any doctor. I surprised a usurer bullying a weaver at work under the shade of a great tree. The weaver had stretched his web on stakes. Bending over it, he was brushing the coarse threads, with his wife and his small boy to aid him. An angry voice, scolding and bullying, broke the peace. The sullen weaver did not answer : he had heard it all before. "What is amiss ? "

I asked, and discovered that the shifty, cross-eyed little man who owned the voice was the *bania* (moneylender). He told me, without shame, that he was collecting interest at 75 per cent. I asked him whether he had many bad debts, since his rate was so high. No : he said, before the present slump, a bad debt was almost unknown. The weaver, it seems, owed 300 rupees (over £23) to various usurers. He could weave six yards of coarse cloth in a day, using the yarn which his neighbours spun, and he made 4d. by his labour—an income, if he worked 300 days, of £5 a year.

I began to revise my first impression of village life. The mud walls do not confine it. The drama of its existence turns on its relations with the outer world. To it comes the *bania* for interest, and the *zemindar* for rent, and behind them both looms the over-shadowing bulk

of Government, with its courts and its police. One dimly guessed its power. The usurer felt that its strong arm sustained him in his right.

The economics of village life seemed to invite an exploration. This matter of rents took my breath away. There were two classes of tenants in these villages. Some had ancient "occupancy" rights, and paid relatively low rents of Rs.5-10 the acre (thirteen rupees, roughly, go to the pound). The majority were so-called life-tenants, and their land-hunger, as they competed for soil to till, had forced their rents up to figures ranging from Rs.10 to as much, in a few cases, as Rs.30.<sup>1</sup>

On an acre an Indian villager, who uses no manure, but waters well, raises six to eight *maunds* of wheat (the *maund* being 82 lbs.), though I heard in the Punjab of a capable farmer who achieved twelve. With eight *maunds* at the price quoted at Delhi in the daily paper, a peasant would make 16 rupees, with a trifle extra for the straw, but the usurer, who is also the local dealer, would give less. Prices this year are half of last year's figures, but rents do not drop with prices. The reader can do the sum in subtraction which will show how much remains for the cultivator after he has paid a rent of 30 rupees out of a yield of 16 rupees. Even the favoured few who paid a rent of 10 rupees would have a negligible trifle, when they had set aside seed (say, 3 rupees) and fed their bullocks.

For weeks after this experience, these figures haunted me. Were they credible? Were the peasants deceiving

<sup>1</sup> These figures were above the average, which in the United Provinces seems to be Rs.4-6 for occupancy, and Rs.10-15 for life-tenants. But *zemindars*, sometimes by private arrangements with the tenants, exact higher rents than the registers record.

me? I might have distrusted them, had I not found confirmation in a cold official publication. It is an analysis of farm accounts in the Punjab, a much richer and technically more advanced province than the region which I studied. Yet even in the Punjab one discovers from the averages of accounts chosen as typical that, under the tenancy system, the income from the land is divided between landlord and tenant respectively, in the proportion of three to one.<sup>1</sup> From the same publication one gathers that even in that prosperous province, in a year of relatively high prices, the daily income of a tenant was less than fourpence. Clearly my peasants, though they were not scientific statisticians, were telling the truth about this monstrous system of exploitation.

That the landlord (sharing his unearned rent with the state) levied an intolerable tribute was not, however, the end of the story. He held these tenants in a merciless and arbitrary grip. The law did, indeed, provide that a tenant may not be evicted save for non-payment of rent; rents may be enhanced only once in twenty years, and an appeal lies to the courts. But it is not the practice to give receipts for rent, and the peasants told me that the landlord always contrives that there shall be some trifling arrears.

I felt sceptical, and insisted that they should produce an instance to me. Promptly they brought her—a widow woman. She had paid in three years Rs.210 as rent, but she owed Rs.6, and therefore nothing had been entered to her credit in the official register. She had no receipts

<sup>1</sup> The exact ratio was as 150 to 55. See *Farm Accounts in the Punjab* (1927-28). The Board of Economic Inquiry, Punjab Rural Section, Publication No. 20.

to show, and she was under notice of eviction. The agent of the *zemindar* who owned this village was squatting in the circle ; he could not deny it. I turned to my acquaintance, the *zemindar* of an adjoining estate, for an explanation of his neighbour's conduct. It came with all the frankness that I had learned to expect from him. "When a tiger is hungry," he answered, "it will even eat a cow" (the sacred animal of India). His own lands were mortgaged (he went on) ; he had some social standards to keep up ; he must be loyal to the government ; money was hard to find, and so he "had to think out oppressions to pay his way."

Even now I had not quite fathomed this astonishing system. It seemed to block all improvements. The landlord himself did nothing to improve his property, and he would allow his tenants to do nothing, lest he should be required to compensate them, if he were minded, by the trick of nominal arrears, to evict them. I had noticed that no one grew fruit trees. They answered my inquiry about this with the statement that the landlord would not grant permission, or would charge heavily for it if he did. I was shocked to find that little if any of the cow dung was used as manure ; it had to serve as fuel. There is a quick-growing Indian tree (*the babul*) which would serve admirably for fuel, and of waste land on which it might have been planted there was enough. But even this improvement the landlord forbade, and such was the general practice. But, indeed, one might go on indefinitely. These landlords, who are not splendid feudal magnates but mere tax farmers, still insist on some of the old feudal servitudes. The tenants may be summoned to bring a yoke of bullocks and plough his home

farm, and when he gives a feast, they must contribute milk and fodder.

**H**ALF the rent goes to the landlord, the rest to the state. What does it give in return? I tested its contribution in a school which served this group of villages. As yet elementary education is compulsory only in a very few exceptionally progressive districts in India, and this was not one of them. The school was a little bungalow of two rooms and a verandah. It was dirty—the rooms cannot have been swept for some days; the walls were bare and stained, and the matting which served as a carpet was in tatters. No pictures decorated the walls. Two maps there were, but so worn and ragged that I could not tell whether they represented India or England—but perhaps it was Utopia.

The one good thing to be said for the school is that among its fifty-nine children, all boys, seventeen came from the depressed classes; and of these some were untouchables, who mixed with the rest. The curriculum was academically aloof from the daily life of the villages. Nothing was taught that had a bearing on Nature or farm life, nor was there any physical training or any attempt at games. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and the geography of that vague land of the tattered maps were taught to four classes by two teachers, at a fee which ranged from a halfpenny to a penny a month. These men had had a year's training, after an entrance examination, in a vernacular college, and they earned Rs.22 and Rs.19 a month, salaries which rank far above the Indian average.

To measure them, one may say that in these parts a young policeman begins at a wage of Rs.17, while an unskilled labourer earns Rs.8 a month.

As I looked at the bright, well-mannered little boys—one does not spend even a halfpenny on girls—squatting as they painted their letters with white on black boards, I began to wonder what place reading and writing really filled in the life of a society engaged in an unending duel with hunger and drought. I asked the teachers what books they possessed. Apart from schoolbooks, they had one between them, which was, significantly enough, a history of the renaissance of the military power of the Rajputs. I next tried the boys, and inquired in the highest class how many of their families had any book at home. Two out of fourteen had one book apiece, a work of Hindoo devotion. One family only subscribed to a weekly vernacular newspaper.

Only five of these boys ever drank milk at home, and in this school were represented only the more prosperous families of the neighbourhood, capable of paying a penny a month for learning. Four boys had no change of clothes. One boy boasted that he had four changes and he, of course, was the usurer's son and heir. The senior teacher invited me to question the class, and with a glance at those intriguing maps, I tried geography. Opinions were equally divided as to whether England or India was the hotter and the larger country.

I left this school wondering what these villages gained by paying to the Indian Government one half of their rents. One knows the correct answer. There is no more war in India. To-day epidemics never slay more than twelve millions at one blow. The population has doubled

as the result of a century and a half of British rule, and Malthus, if he could return to earth, would find in India all his predictions verified.

**W**HILE reading these pages the reader, I should guess, has been impatiently framing a question to hurl at me : " Why don't these peasants and workers revolt, if your account of their wretched lives is truthful ? " That question, let me answer, reveals a Western mind. It comes from the mental world that belongs to a white skin. To answer it I might have to begin by qualifying some particulars.

Life is not all drabness, even in a poor village. The traditional round of ritual and festival goes on, even when rent and taxes are overdue. There are carnivals and dances, and even the daily worship of the temple is often a happy ceremony, for in Hindoo religion there is no oppressive solemnity. But I suspect that part of the reason why Indians are so astonishingly patient and passive is that most of them are half starved. I have heard an English officer say that the first thing one has to do with Indian recruits is to teach them to eat. The average " coolie " lacks the physique which instinctively resists wrong by an impulsive movement of the fists. Save in the Punjab, even the peasants have about half the muscular power of a European worker. Rebels do not start life with malarious spleens.

More potent still is the pressure of tradition and social usage. Caste and religion prescribe an inconceivably elaborate code of conduct. Life is hedged round from

infancy by a net-work of prohibitions and commandments so intricate that the mind of the average man and woman is trained only to obey. An Indian can become a protestant or a rebel only by an effort of which none but the strongest natures are capable. Every caste has its appropriate ideals of conduct and character, and one no more tries to step outside one's caste than a European tries to transcend his sex.

Courage and initiative belong to the warrior or ruling castes. Others do not ape them or envy them. An Indian will plead guilty to physical cowardice without shame. "My father was a coward," a very able Hindoo once said to me, "I am a half-coward : my son will be a brave man." He meant that the habitual caste-morality is broadening out, or breaking down. All this makes, and for untold centuries has made, for a deadly patience under wrong.

This institution of caste, and the habit of mind which it begets, works, however, in two contrary ways. It makes of the individual a unit submissive in mind and body to a degree which startles and shocks the European observer. But when a whole society, a whole village, or a whole nation revolt, they develop a solidarity which Europeans may well envy. The same individual who will submit without a show of anger, and even without feeling anger, to insults and blows will develop a passive but disciplined courage of a high order if the group to which he belongs expects it of him.

Caste, it is true, is breaking down in the towns ; it cannot survive the promiscuity of trains and offices and factories. But the sensitiveness to public opinion which caste creates will long survive its decay. The workers in the textile mills of Bombay and Calcutta belong to a hundred

castes, mostly of the lower order, and speak several languages. It is nearly impossible to regiment them as permanent, paying members in a Trade Union. Yet, when a strike is called, they will show a steadiness and endurance, with neither savings nor strike-pay to help them, which would do credit to any body of Western workers. Indian society does not breed individuality. It inculcates passivity and obedience. But when once it stirs as a mass, there are few traitors and little audible dissent.

Gandhi's movement has awakened the villages to a sense of their power. They no longer feel isolated. Bengal hears that Gujarat is refusing taxes : why should it lag behind ? The novel conception of motion has shot across the changeless horizon. I could see the workings of it even in the minds of those abysmally poor peasants at Kishanpur, in the United Provinces. I should not have asked them any political questions—they seemed too miserable for such abstractions—but suddenly one of them happened to mention *Swaraj*. I saw their faces light up, as if the idea meant hope. I asked them how *Swaraj* would improve their lot. Several answered at once. In a chorus from lean throats came the confident reply, “It will mean that we shall pay next to no rent.” They knew what they were talking about, they assured me. Most of them once saw Gandhi, when he passed through a neighbouring district. I recalled his demands for halving the army, official salaries, and land-tax.

As yet these villagers had not conceived the possibility of resistance to rent and taxes. They could not pay : that was all they knew. They would tell the landlord so, when he demanded the rent : perhaps he would postpone it.

**A**t the next stage in my journey, round Allahabad, the revolt had actually begun. Stranger still, the Congress Party was leading it. It had long hesitated. Like all nationalist parties, it includes all classes. Landlords and moneylenders and the lawyers who serve them make up a great part of its membership, though the rank and file of its volunteers belong rather to the impoverished clerk class. It was easy to mobilise the peasants of Gujarat to resist the Land Tax, for they own their fields. Elsewhere, in Bengal, for instance, Congress suggested rather a refusal to pay the police rate.

For over most of the North and Centre the landlord system prevails, and Land Tax is paid by him out of the rent. Congress did not want to start a class-war among Indians. But round Allahabad the peasants called on it to lead them. They were determined to refuse payment of rents which in fact they could not pay. The Congress Party symbolised for them the idea of mass action and resistance to wrong. It had summoned them to smash the salt monopoly and to picket the liquor shops. Who else should lead them in resisting the intolerable burden of rent? They clamoured for the Congress to organise them. It hesitated for a time, but in the end the ardour of the peasants swept its doubts away.

It did, indeed, invent a subtle strategy which saved it from the reproach of any deliberate attack on the rights of Indian men of property. It advised the peasants to offer to the *zemindar* half his rent, on condition that he would sign a bond promising to pay nothing to the government. Should he refuse, then the peasant would pay nothing at all. These *zemindars* may be more or less nationalist in

sentiment : they have dark skins. But they are not cast in an heroic mould. Needless to say, they signed no seditious bond. The movement went forward as a simple and whole-hearted "no rent" campaign. In November organisation had begun ; and in Allahabad, while I was there, a press was confiscated for printing leaflets which summoned the tenants to resist. In January a "no rent" demonstration of peasants was dispersed by rifle fire. On that for me the curtain falls.<sup>1</sup>

It is hard to see into the immediate future, but one prediction formed itself in my mind as I left this land behind me. The nationalist struggle has roused its millions from their apathy, taught them the power of their own solidarity, and drilled them in the tactics of organised, if passive revolt. "Congress" will not remain a united party, and it has within it men and women whose temperaments will one day place them at the head of a peasant movement. Once India is freed from her absorption in the national struggle, the problem of village poverty must focus her attention. The Constitution drafted at the Round Table may go far to satisfy the claim of nationality, but it is a poor instrument with which to win social justice.

<sup>1</sup> This peasant movement in the United Provinces continued after the truce. A letter from my friend and host, Mr. S. R. Sharma, describes some happenings, in May 1931, in a village near those which I have described. The crops of a tenant who could not have paid his rent, even if he had sold his cattle, were declared forfeited. He removed the corn from his threshing-floor, whereupon the *zemindar* lodged a complaint for theft. When a lorry carrying armed police arrived in the village, the defiant tenant escaped, but the police seized many of his neighbours, few of whom were involved in what he had done, bound them, threw them on scorching sand, and kept them there without water for several hours. Some were beaten. The police entered the houses and took property amounting, more or less, to the value of the "stolen" corn. On the other hand, one reads in press telegrams that the provincial government is preparing a general reduction of rents.

It ignores the village and emancipates its owner. To suppose that India, so handicapped, can peacefully solve her social problems stretches my optimism too far. I came from these villages reflecting that in the minds of their peasants the same thoughts were stirring which in 1905, to little purpose, and in 1918 with irresistible impulse mobilised the Russian *muzhiks* to sweep their landlords down the steep road that led to exile.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EMPIRE'S SLUMS

**H**ow shall the English visitor to India, who knows no word of any of its languages, explore the mental life below the brown skins of its inarticulate workers ?

I think that for a moment I did it as I stood beside a water tap in Ahmedabad. Water in this sweltering climate is more than money, more even than food. One's shirt is wet through after ten minutes' quick walk in the sun. One survives by taking four cold baths a day, and in the intervals between them one envies the black buffaloes who wallow, submerged to their horns, in every wayside tank.

The tap which helped me to understand served two rows of workers' tenements. It was the only tap they had. Left and right of me they stretched, and I counted 153 dwellings, of which 140 were occupied. In each was a family, with its lodgers, usually of five or six, occasionally of nine, persons. On this tap seven hundred human bodies depended for the water of life. Here they must drink ; here they must refresh their sweating backs ; here they must wash their clothes. I felt the water with my hand. One could not call it warm ; it was hot.

My skin had told me what life is like for the Indian worker. And then I entered two or three of their dwellings. I paced them ; perhaps ten, perhaps twelve, feet square. They had no window, and in the semi-darkness never a through breath of air has blown. They had no chimney, and in some of them one noticed the acrid fumes of the cakes of cow dung which serve for cooking fuel. The

floors were a foot below the street level, and in heavy rain they must be flooded.

The roofs were of tumble-down tiles, which certainly would not resist the rains of the monsoon. The two rows stood back to back, and the narrow lane behind them was littered with garbage and green with filthy slime. Each family had only one of these rooms, with a verandah on which there was space for only one person to sleep. But to sleep in such dens is difficult, while the hot weather lasts. Even in Bombay the streets are littered every night with men who have sought refuge in them from their stifling dwellings. They stretch a mat or a bed in the gutter, or even on the pavement, and there amid the roar of traffic and the trampling of feet, they endeavour to sleep. These workers are inefficient. What would you expect? Rarely does sleep bring rest, and rarely do they eat to satisfy hunger. The women fare still worse. They dare not sleep in the open air, and modesty forbids them to bathe naked, as the men will do, under the public water-tap.

From Bombay to Calcutta I saw many specimens of workers' dwellings. Some few, erected by kindly employers, were creditable : many were worse than the row which I have just described.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Report of the Whitley Commission confirms this picture. In Bombay, it states, 97 per cent. of the working classes live in one-roomed tenements, with six to nine persons to a room (p. 270). Of the industrial suburb of Calcutta (Howrah) it writes that the overcrowding is "probably unequalled in any other industrial area of India" (p. 272). Of Ahmedabad it writes: "The areas occupied by the working classes in Ahmedabad present pictures of terrible squalor. Nearly 92 per cent. of the houses are one-roomed: they are badly built, insanitary, ill-ventilated and over-crowded, while water supplies are altogether inadequate and latrine accommodation is almost entirely wanting. Resulting evils are physical deterioration, high infant mortality, and a high general death-rate" (p. 277).

THE export of leather is one of India's staple trades, but tanning is work which only untouchables may do. I visited the place, outside Bombay, where hundreds of them work. They are all Tamils, who have left behind them the relative penury of Madras for the opulence which I witnessed. At home they are landless labourers who possess their naked bodies and little else. There their wage is seven rupees a month, equal to half a guinea. In Bombay they earned up to last February some eighteen rupees monthly, which has now risen, thanks to a successful strike, to twenty-five rupees. The strike succeeded, though Bombay was full of unemployed workers, because these men enjoy a monopoly of their own degradation. A Hindoo, even of a lowly caste, will not touch raw hides.

The tannery stands amid malarious marshes. Inside it, and even outside, heaps of decaying animal refuse poison the air. These dark Tamils work all but naked, for they must stand up to the waist in the vats among the hides, their skins alternately burned and tanned by the lime and the tannic acid. Their hands are coated with human leather as thick as the sole of a shoe. Among them are boys of ten and twelve, and all of them, boys and men alike, work twelve hours a day, three-hundred-and-sixty-five days in the year. Mills have the protection of a most inadequate Factory Act, loosely enforced by an under-staffed corps of inspectors. But to works which use no mechanical power the Act does not apply.<sup>1</sup>

In huts and sheds built with their own hands, among the garbage and the skins, these workers cook and sleep all the year round. In one of these tumble-down shelters,

<sup>1</sup> See the note on Factory Conditions at the end of this chapter.

which measured about 23 ft. by 18 ft., as many as thirty were housed. Even that was not the worst of these dwellings. Against the wall of one of the tanning-sheds I noticed a lean-to, which I mistook at first for a tool-house. But its door was open, and through it I saw three beds. The floor was of earth, and measured 12 ft. by 7 ft. : it was not quite 3 feet high. In this den three human beings were housed.

The owner of this tannery was an Indian. But the landlord of the greater part of this squalid suburb was an institution known as the Bombay Improvement Trust, an immensely wealthy semi-official corporation, run by Englishmen. For the hovels outside the tannery it drew a monthly rent of 5s. These ramshackle structures had tiled roofs and walls of galvanised iron (imagine it in this climate), which the tenants had improved by cutting up kerosene tins. These black holes were 10 feet square, with a small verandah, and each housed from six to eight persons. There were three water taps for about 400 persons, and six stinking privies at a distance of 200 yards. It was growing dark as I left this place, in imminent danger of slipping on the green slime into an open drain. Among the refuse heaps the great rats were already hurrying.

In fairness one should go on to describe what the Government in its various incarnations is doing to improve the conditions of these workers. I might describe the gaunt, comfortless tenements erected on the outskirts of Bombay, but most of them have found a more appropriate use as a prison. There is the rudimentary Factory Act. In such matters a truthful account would have to say that what the Government has done it has done grudgingly, tardily, and with an impressive regard for economy.

In one respect, however, its solicitude for the workers far surpasses that of the most enlightened government of Europe. It knows the temptations to which they stand exposed. Beside that tap of hot water, under the 3-foot shelter, the virus of Bolshevism might flourish with the rats and mosquitoes. It had, indeed, found a lodging in Calcutta and Bombay, and three years ago, of an evening, round these unsavoury tenements, the mill workers, during the leisure of the two prolonged strikes of 1928 and 1929, were actually listening to speeches by Communist orators, and translating into Gujarati the slogans of the Soviet. From this moral peril the Government of India has rescued the workers, and here it has not confined itself to half-measures. Indeed, as the candid reader will acknowledge, it has spared neither energy, time nor money.

At Meerut I found these agitators safe under lock and key. Thirty-one prisoners, three of them Englishmen, are answering a charge of "conspiracy to deprive the King of his sovereignty" over British India.

How they set about it one may learn from the Committal Order, a book of 287 pages. They organised the workers into Trade Unions. They led two strikes. They talked of the class struggle, and created a Workers' and Peasants' Party, which, in its turn, was linked to a select little Communist Party. It is said that some of them corresponded with London, and even, it may be, with Moscow in cipher and invisible ink. No reasonable man

who reads the magistrates' summing-up of the evidence against them can doubt that they went further. It is elaborately proved against them that they celebrated May Day, and used such incendiary watchwords as "Workers of all lands, unite." Had they bombs, perhaps? On the contrary, they opposed, as Communists are bound to do, all individual acts of terrorism. Did they incite to rioting? That is not alleged, nor any act which in England might deprive the King of his sovereignty. In India, where one tap serves 150 families, the throne may rest on more fragile foundations.

The Government of India leaves nothing to chance. The trial, accordingly, was held in Meerut, though the "conspiracy" against the King and his water tap was hatched in Calcutta and Bombay eight hundred miles away. In these cities trial by jury could have been demanded: in Meerut the cause of right ran no such risk. Justice in India is slow but sure, and, as you shall see, it spares no expense.

The prisoners were arrested in March, 1929: the trial began in June. The case for the prosecution occupied a full two years. Experts estimate that the trial may finish somewhere in the autumn of 1931, at a cost of approximately 5,000,000 rupees, and thereafter may come an appeal to the High Court. The charge carries with it a penalty of transportation for life, and bail, save to one fragile prisoner, was refused.<sup>1</sup> Even if the prisoners should be acquitted, as some of them may be, they will have spent two years and a half in prison, including three hot seasons.

<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1931 several prisoners (I think five) were allowed bail, after an application to the High Court, which commented in its judgment with some severity on the refusal of bail by the lower court, and, indeed, upon the whole conduct of the trial.

For robbery with violence they would not have received a severer punishment.

The defence, one may add, costs nothing. There was once a fund ; it is exhausted. There was once a defence committee ; it is mostly in prison. To the devotion of Mr. D. P. Sinha the prisoners owe it that they do not face the judge unhelped.

During the midday interval I was allowed to talk with the prisoners. Two of the Indians I had known in London as eager and studious young men, who aspired to work for Socialism and Trade Unionism in India. The purpose of this trial is plainly to stamp as illegal the mere existence of a Communist Party. But these young men are not Communists, and, indeed, only half the prisoners deserve that name. Two years or more will have been cut out of their lives, even if they should be acquitted, and that for actions or words which thousands of us repeat every day with impunity amid the more numerous water taps of Europe.

I listened to some of the proceedings. An hour passed in verifying the origin of a letter, another in tracing printed reports of a speech. The court has no shorthand reporter, and it is the judge, who is not a trained lawyer, but a member of the Civil Service, who must make the record with his typewriter. A sentence or two of evidence, and then click, click, click, while we all sat idle, public and prisoners, counsel and police.

One began to grasp why justice is slow. The click, click, click of that typewriter has cost thirty young men a year of their lives. Others, it may be, have less reason to complain of the time which they must spend in vindicating the King's sovereignty over India's slums. For each

day of this interminable trial the Crown prosecutor earns a thousand and twenty rupees (about £78), together with expenses and sundry allowances. He sat and earned it on this day with silent dignity.

The proceedings were as dull as they were slow, and I confess that I fell asleep. I wakened as the court rose, in some confusion of mind. I could still hear the remorseless ticking of that loyal typewriter, but in my dream it had got mixed with the dripping of that unique tap in the Ahmedabad slum—perhaps a seditious dream. For I left the court trying to reckon out how many water taps one might erect with one thousand rupees a day, spread over two years. It might have been a cheaper method of assuring King George's sovereignty over India.

#### A POSTSCRIPT

This chapter was written (as a newspaper article) in hot anger after a first visit to Meerut. In cold blood I find nothing in it to modify. I returned to Meerut a second time, and gave evidence on behalf of my two Indian friends among the accused : the court heard with evident surprise that every Socialist Party in Europe, including the British Labour Party, with His Majesty's late Ministers at its head, habitually does most of the acts, teaches most of the doctrines, and uses most of the phrases which figured in the indictment as clear evidence of sedition.

The arrests were made while a Conservative Government was in office, but the trial began and ran its course under a Labour Government. One must not suppose that it

approved. It was impotent: though technically there would have been no difficulty in stopping the proceedings. A weak Ministry may have to reckon, in such cases, with the possibility that important persons in India may resign or threaten to resign; much clamour would follow in the Press and in Parliament. India, in fact, is governed, save under an exceptionally strong and able Secretary, who can count on the Cabinet and the Party to back him, rather from Delhi than from London. It rarely happens that the Secretary has first-hand knowledge of India; he sees it through the eyes of the Viceroy, and of the officials round him in the India Office, who have spent their lives there. I do not offer this as an excuse for the failure to stop the Meerut trial; it is, however, the explanation of a scandal which has left an indelible stain upon the record of the Labour Party.

I wish I could report that the coming to power of a Labour Government at Westminster had in any way eased the task of its comrades who are struggling to better the lot of the Indian worker. Nothing in these two years has changed in the spirit and methods of the Indian administration. It rules, as it always did, in the interests of capital. It still uses the tremendous coercive powers of the Indian Penal Code (so drastic that one wonders why emergency ordinances are ever necessary) to check the effort to organise the workers in Unions. Does a Union send down an organiser, not to foment a strike, but merely to enlist the men in a town which as yet has no organisation? The owner of the local mills (I am reporting an actual case) will call on his friend the magistrate, who promptly issues an order under §144. This at once stops every possible activity on that organiser's part. He may

not deliver a speech : he may not even meet the workers in small groups.

Does a powerful oil company fear a strike ? Orders are issued which restrain " agitators " from entering its territory. Does a strike, in spite of all, break out in some provincial town ? The whole official personnel is mobilised to combat it ; even the Law Courts may close down till this more urgent business is settled. As for the railways, which are State concerns, they work under what is in spirit military discipline, with Royal Engineer officers at their head. Even a strong organisation like the General Workers' Union of the N.W. Railway (Punjab), with over ten thousand paying members, cannot secure recognition.

In short, the Meerut Trial is but an exceptionally gross instance of an official attitude towards labour which is normally and habitually suspicious and hostile.

#### FACTORY CONDITIONS

The first factory legislation in India dated only from 1881 : it excluded children under seven years of age. The present Act (1922) prescribes a maximum day of 11 hours, and a week of 60 hours for adults, excludes children under twelve years of age, and restricts the half-timers (aged 12 to 15) to a six-hour day. There is much evasion of the restrictions applicable to children. Conditions as to health, comfort, ventilation and safety vary greatly, from the model to the scandalous. In some factories one finds well-run *crèches* for the children of the women workers ; in others mothers may be seen working a machine with one arm, while they hold a baby in the other, or the infants may be tossed on a heap of sacks in the corner. On the other hand, some mill-owners, both Indians and Europeans, have inaugurated creditable welfare schemes ; I saw some of these, with their hospitals, dispensaries, gymnasias,

reading-rooms, restaurants, and co-operative shops, both in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Life inside the mills, or at least in those which are spacious and well-ventilated, is vastly more durable than life in the workers' homes.

The great majority, however, of the workshops in India escape control entirely, either because they are too small to come under the Factory Acts, or because they use no mechanical power. In these over ten millions out of India's 11,800,000 industrial workers are employed. Some are permanent, like the wealthy carpet factory in Amritsar, which, as the manager told me, produces only articles of luxury "for Maharajahs and American millionaires." Here boys, aged about eight, worked in the deep shade, which must have strained their eyes severely, through an 11-hour day, for  $2\frac{1}{2}d$ . They are virtually slaves, bought from their parents by the foremen for a lump sum at the outset of their careers. In some of the seasonal factories, e.g. in some cotton ginneries, it is rumoured that a continuous 18-hour day is sometimes worked.

The usual practice, even in the better mills, is to pay the wages monthly, and then in many cases, two weeks after the month has elapsed. The worker, driven, it may be, by debt from his village, must borrow to keep himself through these six weeks. He must bribe a foreman, before he can get a job, and that means more debt. At least three in four of the industrial workers are in debt, and as in the villages it tends to be perpetual : interest usually eats up a month's wages in the year. The usurers may be seen besetting the mill-gate on pay-day : the Pathans commonly enforce their rights with a stick. Women and men alike are in perpetual bondage to the jobbers who recruit them, the foremen and the usurers.

It is hard to arrive at any satisfactory measurement of the real wages of the industrial workers. They are appreciably higher than the earnings of labourers in the villages. But it is clear that no family could live on the earnings of its head, save in the higher grades of skilled workers. If the wife and a child also work, there may be a small margin above the cost of a bare subsistence, which the moneylender will usually eat up.

Figures will be found in the Whitley Report, but it does not risk an estimate. The only clear figures which I could obtain were for Bombay, but they referred to the year 1926. An official reckoning, based on actual family budgets, showed that a family of four to five persons must spend at least 60s. a month for the most modest subsistence. Weavers alone earned this sum ; spinners (male) earned about 45s., labourers from 15s. to 20s., and women 15s. monthly.

## CHAPTER V

## SOCIAL CHANGES

ONE could spend a long lifetime in India and still be a learner in this museum of ancient customs and faiths. But it is equally true that one has much to unlearn. The knowledge that most Englishmen possess is a generation out of date. My first impressions came from an elderly relative who had retired from the medical service, and as a boy I read Thackeray and Kipling. This literary tradition takes no account of the dizzy progress of innovation and reform in recent years. In the last twelve months India has lived rapidly, and the revolutionary movement, which aimed at sweeping foreign rule away, has shaken in its stride much that was native.

I found myself on my first evening in Bombay a guest in a Brahmin home. It was a thrilling experience to adapt myself for the first time to the customs proper to the very elaborate meals which one eats, squatting on the ground ; to witness the simple rites of the evening prayer, and then to watch the daughters of the family and their women neighbours dancing in a ring to old folk-songs. It was even more thrilling to discover that my host was technically an outcaste. After the death of his first wife, he had married a lady who shared his literary studies. The marriage was thrice forbidden by Hindoo law, for the lady came of a lower caste, being a *bania*. She was a Jain (a sect contemporary with Buddhism, and somewhat like it), and, worst of all, she was a widow. For this defiance my host had suffered no practical inconvenience whatever.

At first, the Council of his caste took no action, and would have ignored his triple sin, had he not compelled them to outcaste him by sending them a written notification of what he had done. His family, however, remained in caste, and, none the less, lived in his polluted house. His friends visited him freely, and he retained his public position as a popular leader of the national movement.

Caste, in all the strictness of its bondage, could not survive the promiscuity of modern industrialism with its trains and factories, in which men of every caste, and no caste, jostle. It still so far prevails, even in big towns, that Hindoos rarely eat in restaurants or sleep in hotels. One prefers the hospitality of a home of one's own caste. But the emphasis on a common Indian nationality was bound to break down these barriers, and nationalism is creating a fraternity wider than the old loyalties of caste, creed and race.

This Gandhi's movement is doing, with conscious pride and evident success, though its leader still believes in preserving what he supposes to have been the simple, primitive outlines of the caste system. In the ranks of its volunteer formations, which often live together in camps, one finds young men of all castes and even untouchables, with a few Moslems or a stray Indian Christian among them. They eat their frugal meals in common, and the only concession to the old ceremonial rules is that the cooking is still done, with the due observances, by Brahmins.

Everyone knows that Gandhi is fighting the battle of the untouchables, but he is not alone, and I met some men outside his movement, and heard of many more, who are devoting their lives, with an abnegation that is by no

means rare among Hindoos, to raising and educating these unfortunates. Usually these missionaries were themselves Brahmins. In principle, the battle of equality has been won. With the aid, in one outstanding test case, of the women of the higher castes, who threatened a sympathetic hunger strike, the closed temples are being opened for worship to the untouchables. But a generation or more will pass before this effort of emancipation reaches the backward villages.

More than half of the difficulty is that the outcastes are themselves penetrated by a sense of their own degradation, and feel for the higher castes a shrinking reverence, which has eaten into their very nerves. Even in the North an untouchable who talks to a Brahmin must stand at a distance of several paces. Their talk may be quite genial—I have seen them laughing and joking together—but the inferior dare not approach the Pundit. Once in talking to a group of seated villagers, I beckoned an untouchable who stood far outside the circle, to enter it. He came, shaking with nervous timidity, but he made haste to slink away.

The other half of the difficulty is that the untouchables often are, in fact, degraded—dirty, ignorant, abysmally poor, and given to practices which really are disgusting and “unclean.” Step by step, with the war on traditional religion and the caste pride of the Brahmin, must go the constructive effort to educate the untouchables and raise them in the social scale. It was good to see them, as I more than once did, sharing the village school with more fortunate children. My journey, however, did not touch the South. There, from all I heard, I should have seen fewer signs of change.

**I**T is (if I dare form an opinion) a gross mistake to suppose that old-world India consigned women to a position of degradation. The Hindoo attitude to women differs entirely from that of Mohammedan society. It is one of respect and affection, and, in spite of arranged marriages, it somehow finds a place for romantic love. There is a rare delicacy of feeling in some Indian love-songs. It is true, on the other hand, that tradition denied education to women (as in some degree it used to do in Europe), that child-widows are condemned to a life of frustration, that child-marriage is still a ghastly, though diminishing, evil, and that every rule of hygiene, thanks to ignorance and superstition, is broken at childbirth. But all this has been changing within the last two generations, and the pace, in this year of wonder, has been incredibly accelerated.

Much more startling, however, was the sudden abandonment of *purdah* in the more backward North. This accursed practice, the seclusion of the women behind the curtains of the harem, was imposed on Hindoo women at the Moslem conquest. It dwarfs their minds and ruins their health. In this land of blazing sunshine, the women shut up in shady houses within narrow streets, fall victims in terrifying numbers to the plague of darkness, tuberculosis. It is pitiable in the Punjab to contrast the stalwart men with the puny and delicate women. But even in the North this year has opened the doors of countless *purdah* homes. One heard, wherever one went, the ripping of curtains and veils. The Congress movement beckoned the women to every form of national service, and with courage and devotion they answered its call. They spoke

at its mass demonstrations. They did most of the picketing work. They went in thousands to prison. They were often chosen as the "dictators" of the local committees, and even before this exceptional year, Mrs. Naidu, the poetess, had been President of Congress. All this was interesting enough in Bombay, which has never had the *purdah* system for Hindoo women ; it was startling in the North. At Meerut, which is far from being an advanced or exceptional town, the women met together to consider how they should protest against Gandhi's arrest. Nothing seemed adequate save a procession : but they had lived all their lives in *purdah*. Out of it they came without hesitation, and four or five thousand walked openly through the streets. They never went back to their seclusion. I found them foremost in every public activity, and the men paid them the most generous tributes.

This is, however, only the culmination of a process which has been going on for many years. At the orthodox Hindoo University at Benares it was good to find young men and women receiving their education together. They took part, on equal terms, in the debates of their Mock Parliament, and met one another, a little shyly, I thought, at social gatherings. One marked the effects of this new relationship of equality even in the matrimonial advertisements, which are numerous in Indian newspapers. It can hardly be, one supposes, the more sensitive or self-respecting families which use this modern substitute for the traditional match-maker, and yet these advertisements usually boasted of the girl's schooling. Often the young man asked for a companion who would be his equal in education, and occasionally the advertiser declared his or her readiness to ignore caste rules in choosing a mate.

These signs of change in the educated minority might mislead, however, if one were to assume that the unlettered mass is struggling to keep up with this advance. It lags far behind. I doubt, for example, whether the Sarda Act, which has abolished child-marriage, and fixes the lawful ages at 14 for the girl and 18 for the boy, has had much effect on the customs of the village. Even in towns it is often flagrantly defied. I discussed it in a village which I visited. The Hindoo priest, with the landlord's assent, declared himself strongly for it, and went on to say that when India wins her freedom, she will pass a much more drastic Act. But it has had little effect, he said, in the villages to which he ministered. Three marriages out of four violate it, for the grandparents, as he put it, fear to die, unless they can see the heir who will continue the prayers at the family hearth. I gathered that in spite of these enlightened views, he himself was still celebrating these marriages, and pocketing the far from negligible fees. It is grossly unjust to suggest, as some writers do, that this practice has lust for its motive. It springs from old-world religion and from nothing else. If the priests who celebrate these marriages were made liable to a stiff penalty, they would promptly cease. When one realises how imperative is the teaching of Hindoo orthodoxy—for Hell unquestionably awaits the girl who delays marriage after puberty, and her parents also—the readiness of educated Hindoo society and of Hindoo political parties to prohibit child-marriage is most remarkable. In a Catholic country nothing short of a revolution ever shakes the power of the Church to impose on a lay society the immutable unreason of its dogmas relating to marriage.

This Sarda Act, one must add, was wretchedly drafted.

It imposes fairly severe penalties, but it lays on the civil authority no obligation to enforce it. There is no provision for prior notice of marriage, so that preventive action is impossible. That again, would be difficult without the civil registration of marriages, and this in India does not exist. One cannot fairly blame Hindoo private members of the Legislative Assembly for the defects of this Act. Only the Government could have created an adequate system of registration and prevention, and it was icily neutral. Neighbours, or perhaps some Reform Society, must set the law in motion by lodging a complaint, and with it they must deposit security in cash. Few are eager to assume this unpopular duty and the few who might have done it were usually non-co-operators, and spent this critical year in and out of prison. Moreover, the Indian Government has behaved with flagrant cowardice. When, in the Punjab, the first test case was taken against a Moslem notable who had deliberately and publicly challenged the Act, he was no sooner convicted than pardoned. After that the Act became virtually a dead letter.

The Government proposed for a time to run away even from this too moderate Act, and drafted an amending Bill, which provided for conscientious objections, and reduced to twelve years the age at which the puny body of an Indian girl may be subjected to the strain of motherhood. It "circulated" this Bill, but did not proceed with it.

Oddly enough, the organised opposition to the Act comes from the Moslems rather than the Hindoos. It was they, and not the National Congress, which roused the North-West Frontier against the Sarda Act. Yet the Koran contains a sensible passage bearing on the subject.

What Moslems really oppose is the claim of the State to legislate on matters which come within the scope of the "Sheriat," the Mohammedan equivalent of the Canon Law of the Catholic Church. Here is a fundamental issue, which every society that aspires to civilisation must decide. It was settled in England in Thomas à Becket's day. There is a danger that the rights of religious communities may be so entrenched in the new constitution, that the State will be impotent to legislate in vital social matters.

ON the whole, however, in spite of this official weakness, Indians are struggling hard to solve their own problems of health and education. The Calcutta Municipality, which has had some inspiring leaders, from the late Mr. Das to Sen Gupta and Subhas Bose, has done marvels. If India governs herself in the spirit of constructive patriotism which Calcutta displays, one may think of her future with confidence.

It is even possible that she will dare to grapple with her problem of over-population. Mysore State has set up four birth-control clinics. An enlightened mill-owner of Ahmedabad, Mr. Ambelal Sarabhai, has introduced one into his mills. In conversation even with some of the more conservative Moslem leaders I found no prejudice on this matter.

To conclude this rambling survey of the trend of social change, one must note that Indians who used to play no games, and despised the body, are beginning to care for it. Cricket is fast becoming a popular sport. In an

advanced school, conducted by the Brahmo Somaj, in Calcutta I saw a very fine exhibition of lathi-play (fencing with quarter-staffs) by the girls. This is a sport which demands something more than a quick eye and sure movements : it tests a girl's physical courage.

But it is well to state plainly that the motive of the gymnastics and drills into which the young men are throwing themselves with enthusiasm is manifestly military. The same motive explains the popularity of aviation among wealthy young men. Young India is getting ready to fight. In another twenty years, if a responsible government is free to encourage these tendencies, the traditional division of Indians into martial and non-martial races will be a memory of the past. I should despair of any attempt to expound Mr. Gandhi's doctrines, which seem to me to harbour contradictions. Has the reader noticed that the Mahatma demands for Indians the right to carry arms ?

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PERSONAL FORCES

THE first among the personal forces that are shaping India, incomparably the most dynamic and original of them all, I never met. It lay, the spring of so much motion, behind the walls of Yeravda jail. One tried to reconstruct it from its reflection in the lives and thoughts of other men and women. I met several of Mr. Gandhi's intimates, whose minds his influence directed, and spent some hours in his *ashram* (monastic community) at Sabarmati near Ahmedabad. I found it hard to think of this place as a monastery, though it had its discipline and its rules. It was rather an immense patriarchal family, which had grown up around its spiritual "Grandfather"—for this ("*bapu*") was the name of endearment which everyone in it gave to Mr. Gandhi. There were women and children among the inmates, even husbands and wives, though these lived under the vow of chastity. There were gardens to till and beasts to tend, and everyone performed his obligatory task at the spinning wheel. It was a village which prayed and worked and ate in common, from before dawn to the sudden fall of the Indian night, under a rule so kindly and simple that it soon became second nature. This is no permanent Order, if I understood it aright, which will transmit a fixed tradition to the generations to come. Rather the place is a retreat to which men come for teaching and inspiration, spending a formative time under Gandhi's guidance, that they may

go out, fired by his spirit, to work for India. Rarely, I suppose, have men of refinement and intelligence reduced life to such elementary simplicity as in this *ashram*. It is not done with fury and contempt, as the ascetics of the Christian Dark Ages did it. One does not feel, in spite of the rigid rule of chastity, that these Indians hate the flesh. They live a kindly family life together, and men strive to think of women as sisters : there is none of the mingled mediæval fear and loathing of the temptress. These Indians, though they fast, do not seem to hate the body : rather they are persuaded of its unimportance. European devotion, when it had renounced ambition and the flesh, rarely detached itself so completely from the world of sense. The Christian monastery did not disdain architecture and painting, if the artist worked for God's glory, and it wove, when it sang, elaborate patterns of sound. Indians, when they turn to God, achieve a more ruthless abstraction. There is nothing in this *ashram* to please or even to interest the eye, unless it be the trees. The dwellings of its inmates are bare cells, in which you will find only the peasant bed of cords stretched over a bamboo frame, and a vessel or two for drinking and washing. Mr. Gandhi's cell contained, indeed, a few dozen books, but they seemed a random collection, which gave no clue to his mind. One bows with respect before the austerity which can be content with this extreme simplicity—with respect, for it means command over all that is trivial in human nature. On second thoughts one is less sure that it is admirable. It may, indeed, be what we Europeans need as a corrective against the superabundant energy, the restless welcoming attitude that fills experience with

an endless diversity, and piles particular on particular, till the sense for unity, even the demand for unity is lost. Yet this Indian road to God narrows and empties the universe. It achieves unity too easily by omission.

In the long refectory we squatted round the walls to eat the simple but sufficient meal—the usual Indian arrangement, which does not facilitate conversation—while the younger inmates of the *ashram* served us. A European can grasp with his mind the tense drama of this family meal, but what must it mean to the nerves of Hindoos? An untouchable girl handles with the rest the water and the food: must not the thought of such pollution cause a sensitive skin to shrink and shudder? One risks Hell at every sip. To sit down in this way, all castes and outcastes together, is to join in a sacrament that affirms India's unity. Simply and naturally it was done, without self-consciousness. We Europeans, if we had ever had to break such an institution as caste, would have done it rather more noisily and defiantly. We should have written our hymn of brotherhood, and sung it before we drank the polluted water. Indians are the gentlest and most courteous of mankind. They did and said nothing to remind the Outcaste of her former degradation. Enough that all sat down together.

This movement in its attitude towards religion represents a transitional phase which is characteristically Indian. It is not rationalist in its starting point. It has no respect for science and, I think, little interest in it. It wages no offensive warfare on orthodoxy. The Indian mind, shrinks, indeed, from denying anything. It selects with difficulty, and its religion is a chaos of beliefs and

rites that has formed itself, shapelessly, by accretion, from the thinking and custom of many races through thousands of years. Mr. Gandhi, who is by caste a *bania*, accepts like the most orthodox Brahmin the authority of the sacred books. He will even defend the institution of caste, though he has done more than any Indian to break it down. In so far as he criticises and modifies traditional religion, it is not because he questions the truth of its dogmas : Hindooism, indeed, has no dogmas, but rather usages, laws, and rites. These he subjects to the test, not so much of utility as of humanity. He would keep caste ; but he would admit the Untouchables to the national family. In spite of his intense belief in *ahimsa* (non-violence) as a universal rule of conduct which protects everything that has life, he has been known to kill from mercy. A pet calf fell incurably sick in the *ashram* : there were painful days of hesitation and debate, but at last Gandhi made up his mind that the sacred beast must be put out of her pain. That was a notable day in Indian history. The principle of humanity triumphed over a sacred taboo. Groping, by feeling rather than by the harsh light of the intellect, through the jungle of Hindoo tradition, Gandhi may perhaps do as much in the end to clear it, as the bolder and more intellectual rationalism of the Brahmo Somaj, which one may call a Hindoo ethical church.

As evening fell, the inmates of the *ashram* assembled in a sandy clearing beside the river bank for prayer. The night was fragrant and still. Men, women and children brought with them an atmosphere of joy. They came gladly to the presence of God. It was for them the happiest hour of the day. Catholics, perhaps, feel something of

this joy when they meet God : Protestants, I think, rarely. One felt an expectant hush, as the musician took his place to lead their singing. I wish I could have understood the long hymns from the *Bhagavatgita*, but something I guessed from the look of ecstasy and oblivion that crept over these sensitive faces as they sang. One did not feel wholly outside this family circle, foreigner though one was. Its spirit was peace and love.

Why was I moved ? I do not know : something in the gentleness of this race embraced and touched me. Yet my usual attitude is to deplore their gentleness, even to curse it. It has made them the helpless prey of one intruding conqueror after another. It exposes them daily to the incredible oppressions of usurers, landlords, foremen and police, whom any vigorous Western race would have held in check with its fists, and if need be, with sticks and stones and the blades of scythes. One felt in these villages that even a *pogrom* would have been salutary. It has encouraged in all save the best of us whatever of insolence and brutality is latent in our breasts : the vulgarer type of Englishman would never have taken to insulting and even striking Indians (as he will still too often do, and in the past did much more freely) if there had been any probability that a Hindoo would strike back. He does not treat Sikhs or Pathans in this way. But is not this gentleness and passivity (call it cowardice, if you will) the result (the reader may object), of the enervating heat, of malaria, of semi-starvation ? These play their part, but this disastrous doctrine of *ahimsa* has reinforced them. It rationalises lassitude : it takes apathy for an ideal : it standardises moods of fatigue and indifference. It provides a noble excuse for conduct

which in fact one inclines to adopt because one's physical condition is subnormal.

But surely, the reader may object, non-violence has achieved what its prophet expected : it has brought the Empire to yield what it would not have conceded spontaneously ? But did the moral aspect of this movement touch us ? My own impression is that it rather exasperated those who had to cope with it. They felt no shame in beating these unresisting bodies. This self-immolation called forth an answering sadism. To fling oneself on the ground to be trodden underfoot is, after all, a method of achieving one's end as little rational as violence. It might have moved us to shame in distant England, if the Press had allowed the average reader to feel the force of this silent appeal. The news was censored, as films also were ; but for the most part our Press needed no censor. It did not choose to assist Mr. Gandhi by presenting any picture of events which might have moved the reader to sympathy. Instead it magnified the surprisingly few occasions on which an Indian crowd did lose its self-control. There reached me once in England a smuggled copy of Mr. Gandhi's *Young India*. On one side of the tiny type-written sheet, manifolded in secret, was a sermon on chastity : on the other was a chronicle of the arrests of his followers, here a score, there a hundred. The poor little sheet fell, as I laid it down, upon the bulk of a London penny paper. The sermon on chastity lay across the opulent bosoms of ladies in bathing costumes : the terse additions of men and women who had forfeited freedom to win it, were lost among the racing tips, the murder mysteries, and the thrills of the Atlantic yacht race. What had that world to say to

this? We have grown too frivolous to understand a people moved by this passion. What did affect us was something wholly different. We realised, as the revenue fell off, as our exports dwindled, and the Indian Budget was balanced by loans raised in London, that government could no longer be carried on against a nation's will. It was not the ethical sublimity of *ahimsa* (if, indeed, it be sublime) which softened our hearts, but the mechanical effectiveness of organised "disobedience." To refrain from violence was doubtless prudent and wise: we have the tanks, the aeroplanes, and the poison gas. But the telling argument was no more moral than an armed revolt would have been: it was economic.

The moral greatness of this movement lay rather in its capacity to inspire selfless devotion in its disciples, who are consecrating their lives to raise the masses of India. I do not know how this humanitarian zeal is connected in the thinking of the school with its asceticism, and its rejection of the pleasures of the senses. If the body be so unimportant, why concern oneself with the health and housing of the workers? But one does not ask logic of emotion. Gandhi, however little he may have succeeded in making a consistent system of thought, has rendered the motive of pity and sympathy a dynamic thing in Indian life. It is no mere sentiment. It is translated into consecutive and disciplined work. I saw to my regret nothing of what his disciples were doing for the peasants and the aboriginal tribesman in the villages of Gujarat: emergency police sat, with their rifles across their knees, at the gates of the little *ashrams*. In the industrial city of Ahmedabad, however, there had been no interference

with the work of the Textile Association, which is Gandhi's creation. Like most of the Indian Trade Unions it was founded and is still managed by intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> That is inevitable : these illiterate factory workers, held down by usury and intimidation as well as by ignorance, could not throw up leaders from their own ranks. It is very difficult to organise them. They crowd into the industrial towns, often from distant parts of India. Many leave their families at home in the village to till their little plots, and the industrial population shows a heavy preponderance of men over women, with the consequences that one would expect. Few mean to abandon village life for ever : they are camping in town, and therefore they are indifferent to their surroundings, as settled industrial families would not be.

The intellectuals who conduct this Union in Ahmedabad are Gandhi's disciples, penetrated by the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> Many of these intellectuals are the devoted and disinterested servants of the workers. Some use their position as a stepping-stone to political influence, while others are mere adventurers. Some of these Unions which enable a leader to be nominated as a representative of Labour to a legislative body exist only on paper. Others are financed in dubious ways, as, for example, by the trade rivals of manufacturers whom the Union undertook to embarrass by strikes. One heard bitter complaints of the use which some Governors make of their power to nominate Labour members to legislative councils. In one notorious case the man so chosen is the head of a "yellow" company Union.

Bombay has developed a militant type of trade union, combative, self-reliant, definitely proletarian, and decidedly "red." At the height of its power this "Girni Kamgar (textile) Union" had over 50,000 members : it may count 500 to-day. In its prosperous days it created an elected workers' council in every mill, and its rule is that only actual workers in the cotton industry may sit on its executive. The disastrous Bombay strike (the second within a year) broke it, and it has since endured a split, caused by dissension between the Communist and non-Communist sections. It had vitality, and seemed for a time to have found the secret of leadership, but it strained the endurance of the men too far. It has the proud distinction of standing on its own feet without help from above.

religious devotion which he inspires. They are enthusiasts for all his ideas—spinning and temperance foremost among them. Their leader, Anusayaben Sarabhai, sister of the leading mill-owner of the town, gives her whole time and fortune to its service. Her special charge is the school for untouchable children which she conducts in her own garden. A score of them are being nursed into happiness and self-respect. It was good to see them dancing among the flowers in this pleasant place, but one was forced to think of the millions for whom no one cares. The Union is above all else an organisation which protects and educates its members. They pay their small dues with a regularity rare in India, and it contrives to keep them interested in its work ; though, without the impulse from above, it would never have been started : were that withdrawn, the whole Union would collapse. Its offices hum with activity : it is the social centre to which the workers readily turn in their free time. It mobilises very rarely for active warfare ; the class struggle has no place in Mr. Gandhi's conception of human relations. His outlook is philanthropic : he accepts the present structure of society, with its division between an owner-class and a worker-class, much as he tolerates and defends the division into castes : within this framework he strives to raise the lower strata. The Union holds aloof from the All-India Trade Union Congress—a body in which Left Wing views predominate. It has conducted no general strike in the mills of this district since 1923 ; since that effort, only half a day, on an average, of each member's working time has been lost, in brief partial strikes, usually confined to a single mill. This remarkable record is explained partly by the solid organisation of the workers,

but chiefly by the Mahatma's personal influence. When a grave dispute threatens, he steps in as arbitrator.

The most remarkable of the Union's achievements is that it has won for its officers the right of access to the mills to investigate individual complaints. As many as four thousand are dealt with in a year. By this system of daily vigilance, with arbitration as a last resort, it has delivered the workers from an immeasurable load of small oppressions. The intolerable tyranny in an Indian mill is more often exercised by the foremen and recruiting jobbers than by the management. But the scope of the Union goes far beyond its industrial activities. It teaches its members : it amuses them : it helps them to think, and is beginning to organise them as a voting force. It runs an eight-page weekly paper, which its members receive free. It wages continual warfare on the grog-shops, and runs as counter-attractions a cinema, a reading-room, a circulating library, choirs and five gymnasiums. It will open, from time to time, an exhibition in which through models and pictures it popularises, even for those who cannot read, salutary lessons about health and the rearing of children, and reinforces its campaign for better housing. It works, hampered by its small means, with the usual Indian economy, but it works with love and zeal. To me the most impressive of its institutions was one of its many night schools for illiterate adults. It was held in a ramshackle house in the slums. The teacher, who gave his time without payment, had to work by candle-light. But manifestly his pupils were learning. One might have seen just such schools as these in Russia before the Revolution —with a gendarme at the keyhole. The Union conducts no

less than 23 schools for the children of its members, and in these it may be teaching (in round figures) as many as 1,500 boys and 80 girls. It even runs a hospital with thirty beds, as well as two dispensaries. It is good that it should conduct these schools, but that there should be need for them is a blistering criticism on the State. But, indeed, it would be difficult to enumerate all its activities : it runs restaurants, a grain shop, a savings bank, and a Loan Office from which members may borrow cheaply. Finally, it has begun to wield considerable influence at municipal elections, and has succeeded in imposing on the Town Council a relatively ambitious housing programme.

These are the works of the *ashram*, when it quits contemplation and descends into the world. Where there is a slum, there you will find its members. Its prayers and its hymns take visible shape as night schools and hospital beds. This is not a sterile religion.

THE political news in these days seldom mentions the Servants of India. A generation ago they ranked high among the forces that were shaping this nation. I had the honour of meeting their founder, Mr. Gokhale, many years ago in London ; he had a largeness of mind and withal a poise and a calm which led me to rank him among the great men of our time. He founded an Order which still works and still preserves his spirit of reasonableness, his patience and his genius for organisation and hard work. He was not a rebel. He held office, and co-operated with the British Government, under which, "by the mysterious dispensation of Providence," India has her being

(I recall the phrase, and the smile, half of irony, half of resignation, with which it was spoken). He led the Congress for a time, waging a long internal struggle with Mr. Tilak, the "extremist" of those days, a more dynamic and militant personality, an ultra-nationalist, but a conservative and a Brahmin aristocrat in his social views, and withal a much less scrupulous manager of men. The Servants are men who devote their whole lives to their motherland ; their fortunes are the common property of the Order. It is not easy to enter this very select society, which numbers, I think, only sixteen men, of whom, to-day, Mr. Sastri and Mr. Joshi are the best known. Each works in his own sphere of service : some in politics, some in organising the workers, some in caring for the aboriginal tribes, some in raising the status of women. The Order, though it has the spirit of monastic devotion, is not religious. A fine library, devoted to economics and politics, is the central building of its headquarters. It values, above all else, objectivity of mind and a regard for scientific truth. (Mr. Gandhi also makes of truth a cardinal virtue : she is for him, I think, rather rebel than scientist : she speaks at inconvenient times and uses adjectives : but she tries not to exaggerate, and she will not slander.) This Order ranks high in India by reason alike of its intellect and its character : it has courage and steadfastness in its moderation. No government can seduce it, nor does it pander to the mob. But it represents, I think, as the Brahmo Somaj also does, a reaction against the normal tendencies of the Indian temperament. It strives with difficulty to be what Indians spontaneously are not : cool, reflective, scientific, scrupulous. And yet in its depths it, too, is Indian : it has the national genius for

giving all. It is the sophisticated child, reared on Western science, of the ascetics and the saints, and yet for all its rationalism, it is their child. These spiritual marriages of East and West can never in India run smoothly ; for we brought with our science our colour bar. When reason should have liberated men's minds, we poured into their veins the poisoned consciousness of racial subjection. Because this Order, and the political Liberalism which it has inspired, are not wholly Indian, they create no mass-movement. They are gradualist and constitutional : they have nothing that touches the emotions. They are irreligious, in this land soaked in sun and gods. They will even talk, Brahmins though some (and I think, most) of them are, with a fierce anti-clericalism, which has in it something of the eighteenth century fury against priests and priesthood. Mr. Gandhi with his religious principle of *ahimsa*, linked as it is to the most ancient memories of the race, can rouse the masses, where they cannot even get a hearing. They will compromise with a foreign government which has wounded India's pride to the quick. He called it "Satanic," and proclaimed unflinching, though bloodless rebellion. One notes a certain bitterness among these Liberals as they talk of Congress. The Indian masses have swept ahead of them and left them stranded. Congress House in Bombay, while still it was open, was a swarming ant-heap. Curious, demonstrative crowds thronged the streets outside it. Within its courtyard were fleets of motor cars, placed at its service, and hundreds of young men worked in its offices at fever heat. Ten minutes away was the headquarters from which the Servants did their educational and organising work. One grey-haired worker sat reading in its cool library. More than most

nations India needs this objective, scrupulous temper. In a calmer hour, if that should strike, the Order may regain its ascendancy.

The works which draw their inspiration from the Library of Economics in Poona differ less than one might expect from the works that flow from the fountain of faith in Mr. Gandhi's *ashram*. You will find the Servants of India organising Trade Unions in Bombay. It was a scholarly Servant, whom Nature meant for a student, who went among the Untouchables of the tanneries, contrived, though he could not speak their Tamil language, to win their confidence and gather them in a Trade Union, and then led them in an unusually successful strike. First Mr. Joshi and then Mr. Bakhale organised the textile workers. In the villages round Poona also you will find them at work, visiting certain of them regularly, carrying on health propaganda, and maintaining a magnetic young man, a graduate of the Agricultural College, who is trying to teach them better methods of cultivation. No man in our day has rendered higher service to India than Mr. Devadhar, the senior among the Servants, who has devoted his life to creating a training college for women, the greater number of them young widows, to whom he opens a career as teachers, nurses or midwives. One cannot measure the immense influence of such a college as this, whose pupils go out in their hundreds, to the small towns and villages, carrying with them something of the enlightenment and devotion of the Order.

**O**F the leaders of Congress, in the brief intervals between their terms of imprisonment, I met several. The finest nature and the most original personal force among them was assuredly Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. Son of a wealthy Brahmin family, with an English University education behind him, he is the leader of the Left Wing. I was allowed to see him in prison at Allahabad, and to talk with him for two hours alone—save for the squirrel which insisted on playing with us. A man in the early forties, he has, more obviously than any Indian whom I met, the fire and imagination that make a daring leader. There is nervous strength in the well-set frame ; this man is a fighter. I never heard him speak in public, but some of his written appeals had a rare elevation of eloquence.

He is not of Mr. Gandhi's school or generation, nor does he think in terms of this ethical Indian religion. His outlook is not humanitarian but Socialist. He has no illusions about the possibility of making the lot of the peasants tolerable, without a struggle over the division of the wealth they produce. He does not shrink from the necessary battle with the landlord class, and he knows that it is entrenched in the Congress which chose him as its President. It would not be true, I think, to say that he is a nationalist before he is a socialist, but he understands that the nation must be liberated before its social structure can be remodelled. The key to his conduct is, however, his love and veneration for Mr. Gandhi. A great, some might say an excessive capacity for reverence is one of the fundamental traits of Indian character and tradition : the disciple follows his *guru* (teacher) even in later life with a docility and a loyalty that are not in our European

habits, and bends to his master's guidance even when his own mind is unconvinced. That Jawaharlal Nehru accepted the Irwin-Gandhi truce in this spirit is probable : he had, on the other hand, the satisfaction of seeing Congress pass at Karachi, this spring, a series of rather radical resolutions defining its social policy. What degree of conviction they represented it is hard to say. To hope that Congress, or at least its main body, can be kept together on the side of the masses when the social struggle begins in earnest, may be an illusion. If so, there will be inevitably a period of miscalculation and hesitation in the career of this gifted leader of the Left, but if he stumbles, it will not be from lack of courage. He has what Gandhi lacks, an understanding of the economic structure of Indian society, and a perception that a struggle for power must precede the restoration of the village. He has, what the rational Liberalism of the Servants of India cannot generate, the dynamic driving force of emotion. Has he the other essential of leadership, with which Mr. Gandhi is so richly endowed—an instinctive understanding of the folk-mind, an ability to think along the furrows cut by Indian tradition, while driving the light one-handed plough further and deeper than it is wont to go ? I do not know. The man who talked to me might have been a European intellectual : perhaps he translated his thought for my benefit. The leader who is to win the Indian masses for Socialism must think as one of themselves. But first of all he must seize and select what is essential and universal in its message, and strip it of all that is local to Europe and racy of its history.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, other Indian leaders, past and present, who have come under Socialist influence. The late Lala Lajpat Rai thought

BENGAL is a different India. Nature herself marks the boundary. The landscape seems luxuriantly green after the parched deserts of the West, and the thirsty plains of the North. Of water there is everywhere enough and to spare for the bibulous rice, and the beautiful but malicious hyacinth. Man is almost an amphibian among the creeks and canals, the rivers and the marshes. Indian culture is older and maturer in this province. After the long ascendancy of English education, it is winning back its own voice. It is passing through an aesthetic renaissance, which as yet has hardly touched the rest of India. The Indian imagination is itself again ; in Calcutta it sings, it dances, it writes, much as the Irish mind came to its own on the eve of political liberation. Bombay is commercial : Delhi is sunk in politics, but Calcutta leads an active intellectual life. Bengal has its own traditions in the nationalist struggle, and never accepted wholeheartedly the pacifist-puritan message of Gandhism. It made salt, it is true, and wore homespun. It is less sure about *ahimsa* : the younger generation inclines to terrorism and the Sinn Fein model. One lives in a new atmosphere, and

of founding a Socialist Party. This his successor in the editorship of *The People*, Mr. Feroz Chand, did with Professor B. Narain, while I was in Lahore. The Punjab Socialist Party has started its career, independent and rather distrustful of both the Second and the Third International. Mr. Subhas Bose, the brilliant young Mayor of Calcutta, is a Socialist, and is the President of the Trade Union Congress. The difficulty will not be to win adherents among the younger intellectuals, but to make contact with the peasants, who stand in need, not of theories, but of organisation and guidance in the daily battle with landlord and usurer. A little Communist Party exists—in Meerut jail. Its more popular incarnation, the Workers and Peasants Party, busies itself chiefly in denouncing the treasons of other Left Wing groups, and in fighting Congress. One of the Terrorist groups, that founded by Baghat Singh, also calls itself Socialist.

encounters a different temperament, more richly endowed on the æsthetic side. It has begun to create a modern Indian theatre. It is freeing music from the stiff classical tradition of the temple singers, who made a frigid use of over-developed ornament. One's Western ear may miss the intellectual satisfaction of counterpoint, but Rabindranath Tagore's songs have a subtlety, as the sinuous melody glides through the unwonted intervals of the quarter-tones, which carries the lyrical inspiration very surely to one's understanding. I wish that I could pause to describe the graceful and expressive dances which young women improvise, as they translate a ballad or a song into rhythmic movement. Here, too, I saw a sort of *ashram*, very different from the others. It was the botanical laboratory of Sir Jagadhis Chandra Bose. Its ritual was the demonstration of his infinitely ingenious experiments. Its cells were furnished with electrical batteries, and the most delicate apparatus for the exact measurement of all the responses of the plant to external stimulation. His discovery of its sensibility, and of the contraction of its tissues which causes the movement of sap, made a revolution in the physiology of his science. Here, too, in his company and among his pupils one encountered a new phase of the Indian genius for an almost religious devotion ; the imagination of this race, too prodigal as it seems to Western taste, in much of its art, does not lose its daring and creativeness when it submits to the discipline of an exact, experimental science. This laboratory is not the only focus of original, pioneering work in Calcutta : the Nobel Prize for physics has just been awarded to its University.

All this, perhaps, is foreign to the theme of Rebel India.

Yet from this alert and sensitive Bengali culture may come what India needs for the training of her mind. The municipality of Calcutta, though it has had a stirring political career, is doing good constructive work. Mr. Subhas Bose showed me, with justifiable pride, what it is doing to supply milk to the infants of this great industrial centre. It has created not only lying-in hospitals and clinics for mothers, but a municipal service of midwifery which ensures trained aid for 35 per cent. of the births in the city. Some 60 per cent. of its children are at school, a considerable percentage to attain, in spite of dire poverty, without compulsory powers. He wished to show me over one of its elementary schools—he did not profess that it was typical : it was the best they had, their experimental model. My recollections of that school in the village near Agra were still fresh and I expected little, until I met Mr. Chatterji, who turned, after doing distinguished work in anthropology at Cambridge, to direct the schools of this ambitious municipality. I knew before the morning was over that I had met one of India's personal forces.

The building of the school was unpretentious, nor was it large. We saw first the studio in which the boys model clay. Their work was astonishing in its vitality—little statues of animals so living and expressive, so true in form, so suggestive of movement, that one was forced to accept Professor Čisek's theory of the artistic genius of children. We paused in a class where very young boys were beginning to talk English by the direct method : they had not gone far, but the little that they knew was perfect in accent, idiom and grammar. The three of us, the Mayor, Mr. Chatterji and myself, then went along the

corridor and paused at the open door of a classroom. On the floor the teacher, dressed in homespun, was squatting, ~~making~~ with sand a model of the Himalayas and the river system of Northern India. Every eye in the room was focused on him : every ear was bent to catch each syllable of his explanation. Not one of the children noticed the three strangers at the door. We broke the spell, at the exciting moment when rain was about to descend through an improvised strainer. We talked a little with the teacher, and moved on. I had the curiosity to turn back. Barely a minute had passed, but once more every eye was glued on the teacher, and no one saw me at the door. I know no word of Bengali, yet I dare say that I have never met a better teacher.

If all India could pass through that school, the next generation would solve any problem that is soluble.

## CHAPTER VII

### ✓ WHY INDIA IS POOR

THE old-world legend of India's fabled wealth which dazzled poets and beckoned conquerors has shrunk, long ago, into an antiquarian puzzle. Happy periods and favoured regions there may have been in which it did not wildly distort reality. To-day there confronts us an abyss of poverty so deep that one struggles in vain to plumb it. Everyone is familiar with the figures through which statisticians have sought to measure it. Lord Curzon, in 1901, during his viceregal reign, published an official reckoning which estimated the average income per head of the Indian population as £2, or Rs.30, per annum. The early years of the century witnessed an appreciable economic progress, and in 1911 Mr. Findlay Shirras, as Director of Statistics, using the same methods, raised his estimate to £3 6s. 8d., or Rs.50. This was, however, a period of rising prices. One may compare this with the well-known estimates by Sir Josiah Stamp, who reckoned average incomes on the eve of the War as £50 in Great Britain, £72 in the United States, £30 in Germany and £6 in Japan. There is reason to believe that the improvement has continued, for an official estimate, confined to Madras, reached Rs.102 in 1920 (a year of inflated values). Reckoning the purchasing power of the rupee in rice, this was said to represent in real income an increase of 40 per cent. in twenty years, a calculation which would raise Lord Curzon's figure to £2 16s. (at the 1901 price level), a result seriously lower than that of Mr. Shirras.

On the basis of an inquiry made in 1923 in the Bombay Presidency, Professors Shah and Khambatta estimated that in real income there had been a gain of 3s. 2d., or Rs.2 2a., since the pre-War period. An accurate estimate is impossible, but the truth seems to be that there was a fairly rapid improvement between the opening of the century and the outbreak of the War ; progress since the War has continued, but at a retarded rate.<sup>1</sup> The figures of comparative income, which suggest that on the eve of the War the average Indian had only a rupee for every pound of income which the average Englishman enjoyed, convey a seriously exaggerated impression. The English climate exacts a much heavier expenditure on clothing and house-room, and there is the same disparity in the cost of the typical diets required to maintain the body in health. None the less, the traveller has only to look about him to realise that these starved and stunted bodies, these empty and dilapidated hovels, these threadbare rags, these neglected rural roads, do mean, in terms of health, comfort and efficiency, that the Indian income is a mere fraction of our own.

In this chapter I shall attempt an analysis, which can be only a sketch, of this startling Indian poverty. What are its causes ? How far is it due to Indian institutions, customs, laws and beliefs which hinder the production of wealth ? How far is the policy, past or present, of India's British rulers to blame ? Could a foreign government cope with these hindrances to higher production in so far as they are psychological, or is this a task which only a strong national administration could attempt ? After this study of the production of wealth one must

<sup>1</sup> Anstey, p. 438.

attempt, though the data are inadequate, some consideration of its distribution. What share in causing this poverty do the exactions of the usurer and the landlord play? How much of it must we ascribe to taxation and the "drain" of wealth of which Indians complain from the Dependency to the Metropolis?

### *The Production of Wealth*

**I**N embarking on this difficult exploration, it seems proper to begin with the human factor. What are the forces of labour available for the production of wealth? The census can show how the gigantic potential labour forces of this population, which in 1921 numbered 319 million persons in all India, is distributed among the various occupations. Roughly 73 per cent. are engaged in agriculture and only 10.5 per cent. in industry. The traveller notes immediately the relatively small contribution which women make. They have not yet begun, as clerks and typists, to enter commerce and the public service, and it was only in the few fashionable *swadeshi* shops, started to foster the sale of native goods, that I ever saw an Indian woman serving behind the counter. In the cotton industry women's labour plays a much smaller part than in Europe. Women, so far as my own observation went, take little part, save as helpers, in the traditional handicrafts. Mr. Gandhi's propaganda has, however, induced vast numbers of them, both in the villages and among the middle class in the towns, to take up spinning. In the North, where *purdah* prevails (though it is breaking down), the women of the higher castes, which include the cultivators, are often confined so

strictly to the house that they dare not even carry a meal to their husbands while they are working in the fields. On the other hand, women of the lower castes work habitually in the fields, as they do also in plantations, and in some districts the caste-line is not strictly drawn. In the towns they labour, usually as porters, at the roughest tasks, in the docks, underground in the coal-mines and in building operations. One admires the grace of their carriage as they poise heavy burdens on their heads, but one revolts at this misuse of their slender bodies. Without attempting any statistical estimate, it is evident that women play a much smaller part in the production and distribution of wealth than they do in the West, and far too often when they are employed outside the home it is upon unsuitable tasks. Here, manifestly, the responsibility lies with Indian customs and beliefs, with *purdah* and premature marriage, which curse the higher strata of Indian womanhood with too much shelter, while they fail to protect the lowly. A lavish use is made, on the other hand, of child labour. If this adds something to the productive forces of India it is at the cost of its efficiency, intelligence and health in after life. One must note the burden which Indian piety imposes on the working masses of the nation : they maintain in idleness an immense contingent of mendicants. Finally, one must deduct from the working forces of the people a large intellectual proletariat, which fails, after a literary education, to find permanent work. Here the blame lies partly with mis-education and the system which Macaulay helped to introduce, partly with the traditions of the higher castes.

That this enormous labour force does not, in physical strength, endurance or efficiency, approach any Western

race is a fact of which all European residents are aware. One hears it repeated in daily conversation, in tones that vary from contempt and impatience to sympathy and pity. The low standard of life has had its inevitable effect. I need not be at pains to quote the many authorities, ranging from Mr. Gandhi to certain high British officials, who have said that half the population of India never eats enough to satisfy hunger. One may see fine men among the peasants, giant Sikhs, athletic Mahrattas, though even among these races the women are usually puny. But the coolies of the towns and the villagers of the poorer districts are an undersized race, pitifully slight of build, with poorly-developed muscles—mere fractions of men. Nature has developed a miniature race which can sustain a shadowy life for a short span on a minimum of proteids and vitamins. The average Indian expectation of life is 23.5 years : the same figure for the British population is 54 years. Worse still, one soon comes to realise that the physical life of most of these workers, the villagers no less than the townsmen, is all the time subnormal. They never know what health or vigour mean. The All-India Conference of Medical Research Workers, which met in 1926, recorded in a formal resolution its belief that the annual deaths from preventable disease amount to 5 or 6 millions ; that every individual loses two or three weeks every year through these diseases ; that the loss of efficiency from preventable malnutrition and disease is not less than 20 per cent. ; and, finally, that while to-day 50 per cent. of the infants reach wage-earning age, the proportion might easily be raised to 80 or 90—and these, it declared, are under-statements. Of the preventable diseases the most deadly are malaria and the anaemia.

caused by the hook-worm, a parasite engendered by insanitary habits. Malaria accounts annually for about a million deaths, disables permanently another 2 millions and causes about 50 million cases of sickness, which ought to be (but seldom are) treated in hospital.<sup>1</sup> The average child in a malarious district suffers from an enlargement of the spleen in infancy, and never knows full vitality. With money and organisation both these diseases could be stamped out. There is no justification for the fatalism which blames climate for the high mortality and heavy sickness rates of the Indian population. When one reads that the Indian death-rate fluctuated from 62 in 1918 to 24 per 1,000 in 1922 (the lowest recent figure), while the English mortality rate stood in 1927 at 12.3, one does not know what to think. When one learns that the death-rate in Benares Cantonment stood at 12.3 (the home figure), while that of the native town was 46.1, one has no further doubt. The cantonment and the town have the same climate, but in the cantonment a well-nourished population lives in roomy houses, amid gardens, in wide streets, while in the city a congested and poorly-fed population inhabits narrow gullies of streets and defies within these fastnesses of darkness every rule of health and sanitation. Yet the white population is never at its ease in this climate, to which Indians have adapted themselves through several millennia. One ceases to feel surprise when one has seen the slums of Calcutta and Bombay, that their infantile death-rates stood at 317 and 419 in 1924, while that of London was 70 : the marvel is that any infants survive the foulness of the hot and stagnant air, the parasites, the din, the stench and the

<sup>1</sup> Linlithgow, p. 490.

opium with which nine working mothers in ten attempt to still their wailing. After the neglect of sanitation, one must include among the causes which enfeeble the mothers and bring puny babes into the world the custom of early marriage and premature child-bearing. Mal-nutrition begins with the weaning of the child and lasts through life. India, with its excessive population of useless cattle, produces a wholly inadequate supply of milk, and what can be bought is usually dirty and diluted. It is safe to say that a worker's child never tastes milk (unless one reckons buttermilk) either in the village or the town, save under a few of the more progressive municipalities which have begun to organise a supply. The usual diet of rice and other grains lacks fat and proteid and contains an excess of starch. The villagers rarely taste fruit, save in the mango season, nor do they grow salads. Wheat is a luxury raised for export : the staple rice, especially if it is "polished," is a deplorable food. This monotonous and ill-balanced diet, in which salt is often the only relish, is for a great proportion of the working population deficient, also, in quantity : they cannot earn enough for health and vigour. It is doubtful, indeed, whether India raises more than a bare sufficiency of food for its population. The production of grains and pulses (and nothing else comes into the reckoning for this vegetarian population) would yield a daily ration of 1.2 lbs. per head of the population, after allowing for exports, which amount, even in a good year, only to 4 per cent. One may measure this against the scale of the Bombay jails, which allow 1.7 lbs. to a prisoner on hard labour, while the standard allowance in times of famine for diggers on relief works is 1.29 lbs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anstey, p. 442.

When one realises that the daily output of food is an average which rich and poor must divide, one is disposed to think that slightly too little is raised to provide a sufficiency for the poorer workers.

What this under-nourished labour force loses in efficiency through psychological causes, which determined leadership could alter, one cannot estimate in figures. The percentage of literates in the adult male population has slowly risen in British India to 18.3 per cent., but among women the figure is only 1.9 per cent. The children of the workers rarely spend more than a year or two at school and quickly forget what little they have learned. The quality of the education is often deplorable. Malaria affects the children even of the middle class, and Sir Ronald Ross has drawn a mordant picture of a class of children, all with enlarged spleens, struggling to learn by rote a table of the Plantagenet kings. Living still in a primitive world of superstition and fable, unable to read the clock, to decipher the simplest written calculation, or to read a leaflet, these workers are bewildered amid the mechanism of a factory, cannot grasp the foundations of rational agriculture, and fall an easy prey to the trickery of usurers, foremen and landlords. With their low physical vitality they are strangers to ambition, and they lack the self-reliance and individualism of Western workers. The big communal family of Indian society stands behind them : it will always succour a man when he is down, and with it he must divide his gains. The economic motive as our competitive individualistic Western society knows it, stirs him but feebly. Caste holds him in a tight framework of rules, prohibitions and customs. Religion, through the doctrine of Reincarnation, plays its usual part in

promoting other-worldliness and repressing discontent. When my average life of one score years and three has run its brief course on the lowly rung which I occupy on the ladder of births, my soul, when it quits this despised body, whose very shadow defiles, may rise, if I have observed every rule of ceremonial duty, to inhabit the frame of a Brahmin or a prince. So Lazarus scrambles, passive if not contented, under the table for fallen grains of rice.

That the efforts of this labour force are not employed to the best advantage in the production of wealth everyone knows, and many agencies are at work, though as yet on a small scale, to improve the methods of cultivation—for 88 per cent. of India's workers are engaged in agriculture. In any attempt to estimate the incredible waste of labour, one must begin by recognising that there is a long period of the year, varying considerably in different regions, during which no work can be done upon the land. A low official estimate reckons this interval of absolute idleness as two to four months,<sup>1</sup> and there is, of course, much under-employment at other times. It would be safe to say that this labour force is unemployed through one-third of every year. When one recollects the 20 per cent. of inefficiency through preventable malnutrition and disease, and the slight use and misuse of woman's labour, it is obvious that the first and simplest explanation of Indian poverty is that only half India is effectively at work.

<sup>1</sup> Linlithgow, p. 566.

CAN we reach any measure of the waste of labour due to primitive methods of cultivation? I reckoned with the peasants in some villages near Agra the time required to cultivate an acre under wheat. From the first ploughing to the final threshing, including the laborious watering, forty days of one man's work were consumed. Now, an acre of wheat on a modern mechanised American farm requires only a fraction of one man's labour for a single day. But the wheat raised by forty days' labour must compete in the world's market and sell at the same price as the wheat raised by one day's labour. It seems to follow that the Indian worker can expect, as his daily remuneration, only a fortieth part (or some similar minute fraction) of what the American worker enjoys. That is, in fact, about the actual proportion between their money incomes, for the American wage-earner, even of a low, unskilled grade, easily earns in a week what an Indian gains with difficulty in a year.

Let us suppose that a dictator, working on some Indian equivalent of the Five Year Plan, were to reorganise these villages with Russian ruthlessness for the scientific production of food and raw materials. The same output could be attained by a fraction of the present rural population, and the immense majority would be left wholly unemployed. That is, however, to underestimate the present waste. Even without machinery, science or large-scale organisation the village at present has twice the population it requires to cultivate the fields by the traditional methods. A family can be supported in India upon five to seven acres of irrigated, or twenty to twenty-five acres of "dry," land. If holdings were actually rearranged on

this basis, more than half the present rural population would be displaced.<sup>1</sup>

Given the present level of economic development, India is manifestly over-populated : her villages are congested by under-nourished multitudes who cannot find full-time work in the fields. It is possible in some cases to trace from local records the progress of this congestion. Dr. Mann (*Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, Vol. I) found that in the village which he studied holdings had averaged 40 acres in 1771 : by 1915 they had dropped to an average of 7 acres. Seven acres may in the Deccan provide a bare living, but in Bengal holdings average 3.1 acres, and in the United Provinces only 2.5 acres. This sub-division has come about through the breaking up of holdings at each generation among the heirs. Hindoo law requires an equal division of inherited property among all the children. Hindoo custom, however, in the past, kept the land as the farm of the communal family ; and near Poona I found such families still cultivating their common estate collectively under the direction of the eldest brother. It is only too probable that English judges, interpreting this Hindoo law, have given it an individualist twist and have promoted sub-division. Worse still, since soils differ in quality, the custom grew up (as in the old Russian village) of assigning to each heir samples of each type of land, and these might be scattered in minute fragments over a wide area. Sometimes the individual plot may run, a few yards wide, for a length of over a mile ; or again, the plots are mere garden beds, five or six yards square.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anstey, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Linlithgow, p. 134.

With this evil of fragmentation an energetic administration could cope, and indeed in the Punjab, by far the best governed province, the semi-official Co-operative Movement, using persuasion alone, has had an encouraging success in consolidating holdings ; but compulsion is necessary.

The easier remedies for this tragic over-population are rarely available to any great extent. Most of the soil of India is fully cultivated ; indeed, the cultivated area has trenched unduly on the pastures. There may be scope for some further internal migration to the plantations of Assam. From emigration, given the racial prejudice against Indians, little is to be hoped, save that British Guiana might take another two millions. More can be done by the extension of irrigation. The canalisation of the Punjab rivers, and the establishment, on what recently were deserts of barren sand, of colonies which show a level of wealth and enterprise far above the general average, makes the brightest chapter in the record of the Indian Empire. The same transformation awaits part of Sind, when the Sukkur barrage is completed. Over the whole country some 50 million acres are irrigated, or about 20 per cent. of the cropped area. Of this about half is watered by canals, some of them ancient, and the remainder by tanks and wells. The methods used are often primitive, for from the older canals which lie below the level of the fields a couple of peasants must lift the water by hand, dipping and swinging a skin bucket. It is commonly said that there is not scope for many more schemes on any ambitious scale, but when one learns that the Government's irrigation works yield an average profit of 7-8 per cent., one asks whether the margin of economic expansion

has even been approached. The chief need of to-day is the introduction of a cheap oil-driven pump to work the wells ; but without a great development of co-operation this is impossible on any considerable scale.

Even without any outlay of capital, however, the villager could be taught to increase the output of his fields several times over. The yield of wheat per acre is half the English average ; that of cotton half the American figure ; and that of sugar one-third of what is usual in Cuba. The employment of selected seeds of improved varieties would do much, but as yet these are used only over about 4 per cent. of the area sown. Ridge-cultivation increases the yield of certain crops by 55–60 per cent., and shallow hoeing some 25 per cent. A great part of the cultivated area (about 21 per cent.) is annually wasted under fallow : if leguminous fodder crops were grown upon it, not only could the cattle be adequately fed, but the soil would be improved.

After noting these easy paths to progress, one soon reaches others, which are barred by deep-rooted prohibitions of religion or custom. Of manure of any kind virtually no use is made, or, one supposes, ever has been made. The soil seems, however, to have reached the limit of impoverishment long centuries back : it does not deteriorate further. Farmyard manure is available only in very small quantities, for the peasants use the cattle-dung as fuel. Coal is far beyond their means. Wood and charcoal are available only round the forests ; but something might be done by planting for this purpose and by cheaper transport.<sup>1</sup> It seemed to me that the customs and law regulating tenancy discouraged planting, even on

<sup>1</sup> Linlithgow, p. 263.

waste land, by the tenants. The easiest remedy, however, would be to induce the peasants to use composts of night-soil for manure, as the Chinese do. Here, however, the Hindoo dread of ceremonial defilement stands in the way.

The obstacle of religious belief is still more serious when one turns from cultivation to the rearing of cattle. The sanctity of the cow forbids any rational management of the herds. India has a vast and excessive cattle population, for she maintains 67 cattle for every 100 acres sown, while Holland has only 38 and Egypt 25. Yet the Hindoos eat no beef, and drink a negligible quantity of milk. Vast numbers of starved and aged beasts, of poor stocks and diminutive stature, pick up a living as best they may, when the common pasture land will yield no more, from the stubble, the weeds or the fallows, or by raiding the crops. In spite of her sanctity, the cow is not valued, and often leads a miserable existence. More care is bestowed on the female buffalo, valued for her milk, and upon the oxen used for ploughing and draught. Aged beasts must not be slaughtered, though life is a burden, yet unwanted buffalo bull-calves are allowed to starve to death. It is not love or care for the beasts, but a superstitious taboo on the act of taking life which underlies the Hindoo doctrine of *ahimsa*. India will greatly increase her wealth, and with it the happiness of her animals, when she can bring herself to slaughter useless beasts, and conserve the available food for those that remain. If better bulls for breeding were readily obtainable, an annual yield of 8,000 lbs. of milk could be obtained, given adequate fodder, where to-day the cows furnish virtually no milk. Early cutting and storage of the jungle grass would yield ample food in some regions. Egyptian clover (*berseem*) could be grown on

the fallow land. Much, also, might be done to popularise the silo.<sup>1</sup> The scope for progress seems unlimited, but little can be achieved until a frontal attack is made on superstition. One must mention in this connection the unchecked ravages of monkeys and other wild animals, especially rats. It has been reckoned that this taboo on the taking of life costs India, through the maintenance of aged and defective cattle, four times the land-revenue, and through the toleration of rats, more than the military defence of the Peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

ONE might, on these lines, give rein to one's imagination through a long vista of day-dreams. It is evident that the theoretical possibilities exist for an immense increase of India's income from agriculture and the rearing of cattle. If one chooses to suppose that this inert, ignorant, half-starved peasantry could be galvanised into zeal for economic progress, and organised for a concerted effort, it could, within a brief span of years, abolish the poverty which renders Indian life subnormal, raise for much more than the present population a sufficiency of nourishing and varied food (which need not include meat), and dispose in addition of an increased surplus for export. But it is no less evident that if the labour force in the fields were intelligently organised, there would be work on the land only for a fraction of the village population. At an early stage in the process of reorganisation

<sup>1</sup> See generally Linlithgow, chap. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Anstey, p. 54. Cheese is also forbidden, since it involves the use of rennet : perhaps research could discover a synthetic substitute.

half of it would be found to be superfluous. The problem of over-population turns out to be a problem of wasted labour. One must have seen women squatting on the ground and cutting the grain listlessly with a tiny sickle ; one must have watched the men spending fifteen days to water an acre of wheat, by laboriously raising water from a well with the aid of a pair of leisurely oxen, to realise what this waste of labour means.

What alternative employment is available ? Our assumption that progress has begun in the fields, carries with it the further consequence that the cultivators have now some little surplus income, after the needs of bare subsistence have been satisfied. There will be a growing demand for clothing, furniture, better housing, and even for cheap luxuries. Start with the improvement of agriculture and it is possible (but not otherwise) to reckon on a great expansion of industry, and of rural enterprises which at present are neglected by the peasantry. The rearing of poultry is neglected, partly because the Hindoo respect for life extends even to an unfertilised egg. The present generation, however, is growing much less strict, and in Bengal even Brahmins will sometimes eat not only eggs, but fish. Much might be done to expand the fisheries, and to build up a fruit-canning industry. Much might be done with sericulture, but again religion forbids, though Hindoos will wear silk without scruple. There should be promise also, in other trades subsidiary to agriculture such as the making of implements<sup>1</sup> and ropes. The trade in *lac*, for which the gramophone has created a great demand, might be much better organised. In the long run, however, India must depend on the staple

<sup>1</sup> Linlithgow, p. 567-9.

industries : she must clothe herself, and provide her masses with houses in which they may lead a healthy and self-respecting existence. In satisfying these new needs, it should be possible to find employment for the superfluous population of the villages. Indian thinkers and politicians who rely upon a policy of high protection to foster their national industry, are ignoring the fundamentals of the problem. Tariffs may be a proper means to use, but they can at best divert to the native mills the demand now satisfied by Lancashire, and they may impoverish the peasantry further, if they raise prices by the whole amount of a high duty. They cannot create an expanded demand in the main internal market. That is the village. The first step must be to assist the cultivator to produce more, and to produce it with less labour. When two men can raise twice as much wheat as four grow to-day, the third may weave the clothes they will demand, and the fourth set to work to build them a sanitary house. That, put in language of childlike simplicity, is the only conceivable solution for over-population. Fewer men must draw more wealth from the soil—so much more that their surplus will support those cultivators whose labour in the fields has become superfluous, and reward them while they cater for the expanded needs of those still active on the soil. There is another reason why agricultural development must, by the logic of economics, precede any great industrial expansion. The surplus from agriculture available for export is the only considerable resource from which India could finance the import of machinery. Russia, in a similar situation, had oil to sell : Nature has given India no such asset.

Two schools of thought will struggle violently when India is free to plan her own industrial development. Mr. Gandhi's school will strive to restore village handicrafts. The Bombay millowners and the Indian capitalist class generally, will press for the encouragement of machine industry. As an immediate expedient for the relief of impoverished villagers, who can find nothing better to do through months of inevitable unemployment, the revival of the spinning wheel can be justified. It is, however, a most primitive tool, and Congress is now inviting inventors to design better machinery for carding and spinning, which can be worked by hand. With official encouragement an improved handloom has been popularised in some districts, which raises output by 40 per cent. The attraction of the little *charka* is, however, its simplicity and cheapness. So soon as one begins to suggest more elaborate and costly implements for the craftsman, one must provide him with credit to purchase them, and it is no less necessary to enlist him in a co-operative organisation which will market his products, and deliver him from the exploitation of the middleman. I talked to a village weaver, who usually wove for his neighbours the yarn which they had spun, making a small charge for his labour ; but as one would suppose, the demand was erratic, and he was often without work. The attempts to organise the weavers co-operatively have so far had little success ; perhaps because they are all enslaved to usurers. One asks whether, if co-operation can be made a success, it need stop short at individual production. At present weaving is confined to the hereditary weavers' castes, and each village tends

to have its one weaver and its one potter. The caste line will have to be broken, if industrial work is to be provided for the superfluous cultivators. Could one then move on to co-operative workshops? In that case why should one not call in electric power?

One sympathises with some of the grounds which seem to underlie Mr. Gandhi's hatred of machine industry. If it necessarily meant that the peasant, uprooted from his village, where at least he has sun, clean air, and the pageant of Nature round him, must live in a filthy and congested slum within a great city, and work under a petty tyrant of a foreman, one might be willing to sacrifice much of the wealth of nations to escape it. It need not mean this. A relatively comfortable and healthy worker's dwelling (though with outside sanitation) can be built in India for £26<sup>1</sup>; town planning could break up these slums, and forbid their growth in the future. There remains the worker's attachment to his village, and his reluctance to lose himself for ever in a vast alien city, where men speak an unknown tongue and honour strange gods. Electricity, by dispersing industry and cheapening transport (for in the Bombay Presidency the electrification of the railways has begun) may go some way towards meeting these objections, and may in the future provide industrial work at home, in co-operative workshops and even in factories, for the villagers without compelling them to expatriate themselves.

There has been in recent years a considerable development of hydro-electric power in India, especially in the region of Bombay, for the benefit of its large-scale industries. The capital cost of constructing dams is,

<sup>1</sup> Whitley, p. 291.

however, heavy, and current is expensive (.75-.5 of an anna per unit, as against .1 of an anna in Norway<sup>1</sup>). It is probable that the private monopolies are exploiting the public, but India's poverty restricts the demand. With an increased load, the charge could be much reduced. As yet, however, even the best of the few good model dwelling schemes for workmen stop short at the provision of electric light. One turns in a circle. If India were richer, she could provide cheap electric power and develop her industries : until she develops them, she will remain over-populated and poor.

A vicious circle of this kind is broken, as a rule, by calling up, or calling in new capital, or unemployed reserves. India has these reserves in abundance, and need not depend on imported capital for her future development. Everyone has heard of her fabulous hoards of gold and jewels : she has been called the sink of the world's precious metals, and estimates which look fantastic, but may in fact be sober, have been compiled in the attempt to measure this sterile wealth. The one fact that is certainly known is that India annually imports as part payment for her exports, gold to the annual value (taking an average over the last five years) of 53 crores of rupees (£39,750,000). This gold does not serve as a basis for credit, and little of it finds its way to the banks ; indeed, the banking system is yet in its infancy. It lies in safes and chests : it is deposited in temples : it adorns the persons of the women : it is even buried. This process has been going on through time immemorial, and the

<sup>1</sup> Anstey, p. 33.

total accumulated stock (even if we refuse to believe the statisticians who have tried to guess at its amount) would suffice for an immense capital development. Every Rs.100 of this gold if it went into a bank as a deposit would serve, according to the usual rules, as a basis for another Rs.900 of bankers' credit. This will doubtless happen, very slowly and gradually, as Indian society modernises its outlook and its habits. Could the process be accelerated ? A foreign government cannot touch the keys of emotion which might release it, nor can it be mobilised by the usual commercial appeal. In so far as it is in the hands of Moslems, they think it wrong to lay it out to interest. It is possible, however, that patriotism might conjure a part of it out of the ground, and if once a habit were formed, the rest of it would gradually follow. Women brought their ornaments to Mr. Gandhi, freely giving them for the purpose of liberating India from foreign rule. Would they do as much, if an Indian Administration, with some magnetic personality at its head, and a powerful party organisation behind it, were to appeal for this hoarded gold to swell a guaranteed development loan ? I believe that a really dynamic party could achieve this miracle, but nothing less than an emotional appeal to the patriotic imagination of India would suffice to break the habit of countless generations. This money, moreover, is in the villages : it cannot be reached by prospectuses and newspaper articles : missionaries must go out and fetch it, aided by the visual appeal of pictures scattered everywhere, by travelling troupes of actors, and, I would add, wireless propaganda. The capital, in short, can be raised if the Indian village could be magnetised into a belief in planned development and scientific

progress. That is an abstract way of summing up its belief in a large number of very simple propositions : that one should sow selected seeds, breed from pedigree bulls, plant certain grains in ridges, sow clover on the fallows, consolidate one's holdings and overcome one's shrinking from the use of night soil. A loud-speaker under the central banyan-tree in every village, amusing and teaching the people by turns each evening, might in a few years transform their whole mental outlook. A foreign bureaucratic machine could not execute, or even conceive such a task. It implies a deliberate war upon traditions and even upon religious beliefs, which no alien rulers dare risk. Only a powerful and popular Indian party, controlling the resources of the public administration, yet touching the common people intimately in their daily lives, could essay such a task with success. When it begins to interest the Indian masses, and to fire them with a constructive national ambition, such a government will be able to extract this hoarded wealth, which it will employ to finance land banks, irrigation and electricity schemes, housing plans, the sinking of wells, and the supply of oil-engines, the multiplication of agencies for the provision of seed, and the organisation of rural industries.

### *Responsibilities*

ON the basis of a study so slight as this of the production of wealth in India, it may be rash to apportion the responsibility for the astonishing waste of labour which explains the general poverty. But some rough, summary opinions about India's economic history since

British rule began, one cannot refrain from forming. One's first reflection, when one has seen it at work, is that its efficiency is unduly concentrated upon the elementary tasks of government—police, justice, and the maintenance of order. The constructive tasks of economic development and popular education it neglected entirely through many generations : when it did attempt them, it did so on a small scale tentatively and with stinted funds. This unlucky balance of efficiency in one direction, with neglect in the other, goes far to explain why the development of industry failed to keep pace with the growth of population. One of the "natural" checks on population (to use Malthusian language) was entirely abolished. Save on the fringes of the North-West Frontier, war ceased to slay over the vast area of the Peninsula, where before it had raged incessantly. The other checks were undoubtedly lessened. Famine, by the end of last century, had so far been disciplined by the improvement of communications and the gradual development of an official technique of relief, that it no longer causes the former mortality : under the Moghuls it literally depopulated wide regions. Again, while painfully little has been done to raise the general health of the population, some measure of success has been achieved in fighting plague and cholera, though an epidemic of influenza (in 1918-19) swept off some 13 millions. These benefits of British rule have done their work. India enjoys peace with semi-starvation, and her population has been doubled in 150 years.

The same ambiguity hangs over other gains. The Western conquerors built railways and roads. The balance of benefit, social, political and economic, is overwhelming : yet this penetration of the villages

involved the gradual decay of the traditional crafts. Over the roads poured a flood of cheap machine-made goods, and to-day the motor-bus may complete their ruin, for it carries their customers for a trifle to the nearest market-town. Slowly at first, but at last with remorseless swiftness, the village craftsmen have had to abandon their trades, and have been flung back upon the land for a living. Even in the later part of the period, the census reveals this process, for between 1891 and 1921 the percentage of the population occupied in "pasture and agriculture" rose from 61 to 72. The ugliest chapter in the records of our Empire is that which relates the deliberate destruction by prohibitive duties, under the East India Company, of the thriving export trade of India in fine textile goods. Our economic doctrines shifted according to circumstances with our interests. In the early period we used every known device of fiscal policy to destroy Indian manufactures and foster our own imports. Thereafter, when our own earlier adoption of power-machinery had given our goods an overwhelming advantage, we went over to free trade and imposed it on India also. The result was that an abnormally long interval of several generations stretched between the decline of India's traditional home-industries and the belated effort on a small scale to create a native machine-industry. India, it is often said, is suffering to-day from arrested development: she lags a century behind the rest of the civilised world in her entry into the machine age. This is a true but incomplete statement of the facts: the delay was imposed by the policy of her conquerors. The consequences in their bearing on population were, and still are, ruinous. Under native rule, her handicraft industries and exports would

have survived much longer : power-driven machinery would have been introduced by native capitalists much earlier, and would have progressed more rapidly under the protection of a tariff. The craftsmen would not have been driven to seek their livelihood from the soil, and the average income might have risen to something like the Japanese level.

Partly in obedience to British interests, partly under the influence of doctrinaire principles, the Government of India adhered, throughout the nineteenth century, to the doctrine of *laissez faire* in its extremest form. It did nothing to foster Indian industries, and would have denied that it was any part of its duty to concern itself with such matters. Military considerations would alone have compelled it to favour the building of railways : in addition they served as an outlet for British capital, which was protected from any element of risk by a guarantee of its interest. The inland waterways were neglected—as they were at home. There is one mile of the metalled roads for every seven miles in France. On the other hand, much was done for irrigation, a duty which the better of India's oriental rulers had also fulfilled within their capacity. The good record in this matter is balanced, however, as Sir William Willcocks has shown, by grave mistakes in Bengal, where railway embankments were allowed to cut across drainage canals, while other ancient canals were mistaken for rivers, with the result that they silted up under neglect. If deserts have been gloriously reclaimed in the Punjab, whole regions in Bengal have lost their fertility, and have become malarious swamps. One has no difficulty in understanding the stern adherence to free trade dogma, which forbade India to foster her infant

industries by a tariff : the immutable principles of economic science favoured Lancashire. When at length duties on imports were imposed for revenue purposes, a counter-balancing excise was levied on Indian cotton manufacturers.

Under Lord Curzon one notes the beginning of an attempt to foster minor Indian industries, especially by research. Lord Morley, the last of the consistent Victorian Liberals, sharply intervened to check this departure from *laissez faire*, and the opinion of the English business community, not in other respects conspicuously liberal in its outlook, supported him. The test case was raised by the Madras Government, which created a Department of Industries in 1906, and named Mr. Alfred Chatterton "Director of Industrial and Technical Inquiries." He established an experimental aluminium industry, a chrome tannery, some handloom weaving factories, and started research upon well-boring and the adaptation of oil-engines to irrigation. Lord Morley suppressed the Department and would sanction nothing beyond technical education, whereupon Mr. Chatterton took service with the Indian State of Mysore. With the war this obstructive Liberalism vanished, and the Indian Government for several years followed an active policy on the lines inaugurated in Madras. A reaction set in, however, under the financial stringency which prevailed from 1924 onwards, and many of the provincial efforts to foster native industries have come to an end. That year, however, saw the adoption of protection at last as the accepted policy for India ; the excise on cotton was abolished, and the Indian industry has since enjoyed a tariff advantage on piece goods of 15 per cent. The Tata firm was helped by a  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent.

duty and for a time by bounties also, to create an Indian steel industry. The Empire surrendered in the economic field to Indian nationalism somewhat earlier than in politics.

It is harder to understand the long delay in adopting a policy of constructive aid for agriculture, for no British interest here stood in the way. On the contrary, every advance in farming and every addition to the farmer's buying power would have promoted British trade and eased the task of government. Nothing was done, even in the way of research, until 1903, and then only when Lord Curzon accepted a gift of £30,000 from Mr. Henry Phipps of Chicago to establish an experimental station at Pusa. It has done much admirable scientific work, and the same may be said of some of the provincial stations which have followed it, notably, in the Punjab. But the new seeds and the new knowledge, in spite of the care taken to adapt all the results to the conditions of the small peasant cultivator, reach him very slowly. The problem of teaching the peasant cannot be solved officially, from above. The Co-operative Societies, which should have been the chief means for aiding the villager to make improvements and to market his produce to advantage, make no perceptible progress. The law permitted their formation only after 1912, and they have gained in All-India only 181,000 members. Virtually nothing has been done to help the peasants with their marketing, and they remain the prey of rapacious middlemen, who are often usurers also. The attempts made to cope with the usurer by restrictive legislation have all admittedly failed.<sup>1</sup> The only way to defeat him is to furnish cheaper credit. This

<sup>1</sup> Linlithgow, p. 436.

the Co-operative Banks are doing, especially in the Punjab, with a measure of success. They date from 1904, and have now, all over India, 3,600,000 members, which seems a large number until one realises that it includes only 1.3 per cent. of the cultivators. The Government everywhere took the initiative in forming these credit societies, with the result that the members rarely have much understanding of co-operative principles : the Punjabi peasants with whom I talked invariably spoke of the Co-operative Credit Society as "the Government bank." Since they must accumulate capital by their profits, they charge high rates of interest, which range from 6 to 25 per cent. Useful though they are, these banks do not seem, even in the Punjab, to drive the usurer out of the field, and the load of debt continues to grow. Even in the Punjab, which is in this, as in other respects, a model far in advance of the rest of British India, the expenditure of the Government on agriculture is still pitifully low, when one compares it with that of Western countries, where farming interests a much smaller proportion of the population. As Mr. M. L. Darling has pointed out, the Punjab spends in promoting agriculture Rs.79 per 1,000 of the population, against an expenditure of Rs.960 in Great Britain, Rs.945 in pre-War Germany (at lower prices), and Rs.1,020 in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

It is this negative record, qualified though it is in our own day by a belated but niggardly amendment, which must figure as the central fact in any verdict on the results of British rule. Through a century the English conquerors took upon their own shoulders the responsibility for governing this population. They dwelt amid its

<sup>1</sup> *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, p. 715.

poverty, its ignorance, its physical misery and its helplessness, and never dreamed of using the immense resources of the efficient machinery of government which they had created to teach it, to heal it, to organise it out of its backwardness and inertia. They aggravated the pressure on the soil by hurrying the destruction of handicraft, and postponing the growth of industry. By suppressing, until our own day, all political initiative among the governed, they lamed its will and checked the working of its powers of adaptation ; they violently changed its economic environment, yet they held in check the forces in Indian society which would have reacted to the new conditions and remodelled its structure.

This sketch has deliberately underlined the factors inherent in the social structure of India and in Hindoo belief, which explain her poverty, and militate against economic progress. In them, and not in the evils of foreign rule, lie the direct potent causes of poverty and over-population. It is part of the curse of subjection that Indians, when once they have set their minds towards freedom, ascribe every ill from which they suffer to the foreigners among them, and either ignore the effect of their own institutions, or even idealise them, because these things, at least, are their own. But the more one realises that caste, child-marriage, *ahimsa*, reincarnation and the whole Hindoo heritage of obsolete thinking are fatal obstacles to economic well-being, to social justice and to physical health, the more passionately does one long to see the end of the daily conquest of India. To remove these obstacles, to transform the mind which the masses inherit, to fight the native forces which maintain

superstition, the Indian nation must first be self-governing and free. No radical movement for the overthrow of these customs and beliefs could gather momentum under the present system of government. India suffers from arrested development not merely because her equipment of machinery, measured in horse-power, is far behind that of any Western country. That is an external trifle, easily remedied : one can buy machines. The arrest of development which matters, is that Indian society, as a whole, has passed through no experience comparable to the rationalistic and realistic movements which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lifted Europe out of the Middle Ages. Such movements could take no root because so soon as India was ripe for any collective thinking, she inevitably turned nationalist. Nationalism criticises the foreigner : it does not turn inward to analyse the inheritance of the past.

### *The Distribution of Wealth*

THE meagre wealth which India produces in her congested villages by ill-organised toil is ill distributed. In that respect her case is not peculiar. What is singular in her misfortune is that the parasitic classes which her labour must support for the most part turn their incomes to no economic use. One cannot make for the accumulations of the village usurer and the *zemindar* (landowner) the plausible defence which capitalist economics can muster for the entrepreneur, the banker and the more progressive type of landlord in the West. The usurer levies a merciless tribute, but when he has grown rich by charging anything from 37½-75 per

cent. for loans of a trifling amount, which breed at compound interest, he rarely turns the capital which he has amassed to any productive use. Cases occur in which a *bania* (the word means 'trader' as well as 'usurer') will start a flour-mill or a ginnery, but they are rare. Nor can it be said that the rural usurer performs an economically useful service by lending money. Rarely does the cultivator borrow from the usurer to effect improvements on his holding. He borrows because misfortune has overtaken him—his plough-oxen or his milch-buffalo have died—or because he must celebrate a marriage. In short, the debts of the village are almost wholly unproductive. If a man has the intelligence to improve his land, he will go to the co-operative bank for a loan, and not to the usurer.

Apart from its direct effect in lessening the cultivator's income, this institution of usury is the root of many social mischiefs. It saps any fund of energy and ambition that malaria and semi-starvation may have left in the peasant's nervous system. Why toil unduly when everything beyond a dish of porridge seasoned with salt must go to the money-lender? Again, the land is slowly passing in the poorer districts into the ownership of the usurers: the former owner continues to till it as a tenant, but without interest or hope. Again, this institution is one of the chief causes of communal strife: Islam forbids usury, and it is accordingly Hindoos who draw from Moslem peasants and labourers their curses with their pence. Finally, the usurer, holding entire villages in his grip, commands enormous social and political power, which he wields invariably for reactionary ends. Of course he uses it to thwart co-operation: but he will even resist the use by indebted weavers of improved looms, which might render

these wretches independent. He has in his pay lawyers who fight his cases for him, and prostitute their brains to serve his interests in elected assemblies. The capitalist party in India is small : one may reckon the industrial capitalists at a few thousands.<sup>1</sup> But politics are dominated by parties based on property, which is apt to mean in India the interest of the usurer, the middleman and the *zemindar*, with their legal spokesmen. The tax returns reveal the importance of this great section of the propertied class. Even in the Punjab (where co-operative banking trenches considerably on its field of action) one in four of the payers of income tax are usurers. What is the part which they draw from India's income one may guess approximately. The debt of the cultivators alone is estimated at £400 to £500 millions.<sup>2</sup> If the interest were only 30 per cent. (and I never came on a figure so low) this would represent an annual income (on the lower estimate) of something over £120 millions. Call 10 per cent. a fair rate : the extortionate tribute is therefore something over £80 millions: perhaps £100 millions would be a moderate guess. Contrast this with the burden of the land revenue, which varies round about £25 millions, or with that of military defence, a fraction over £42 millions.

The dealers and middlemen who handle the villager's produce are numerous, and some harvests, on the road from the village to the port, must run the gauntlet of a long chain of them. Attempts at co-operative marketing have failed, notably in the case of jute, where the dealers

<sup>1</sup> According to the Census of 1921 there were only 11,000 industrial concerns employing 20 or more persons.

<sup>2</sup> G. T. Garratt, *An Indian Commentary*.

(an exceptional case) are Europeans. The local village dealer is usually the usurer, who may also keep a shop. The profits of dealing are high and the most rascally cheating common. Denunciations of these "thugs" (a word which sober economists will use) are common, even in official documents<sup>1</sup>; but I know of no attempt to estimate the proportion of the income of the village which they annually drain off.

**F**INALLY, among the parasites who live upon the labour of the village, we must set in the place of honour the landlord, or *zemindar*. He is occasionally a prince whose family has lost its sovereign rights: more often (as in Bengal) his family, though wealthy, reckons its distinction only by four or five generations: oftener still he is a parvenu who has bought out a degenerate old family: finally, he may be a usurer who has foreclosed, and appropriated a debtor's fields. The system of land tenure as it exists to-day was a British creation. The East India Company found tax-farmers everywhere established, who collected the land revenues of the Moghul, for which service they retained a commission. Whether ignorantly, or from policy, it chose, throughout Northern India, to regard these functionaries as landlords, and it conferred upon them what Indian law and usage had never allowed them—the ownership of the soil. This arrangement doubtless seemed natural to younger sons who brought with them to India the outlook of an English squire's family: it was also an act of policy, for the foreign conqueror bought the loyalty of this new nobility by

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Linlithgow. See also Anstey.

authorising it to exploit the peasants. The creation of landlords has continued : it mars the good work of the Punjab irrigation colonies, and I gathered that it will reappear round the Sukkur barrage in Sind. The worst form of this system is to be found in Bengal, where Lord Cornwallis made a "permanent settlement" on the basis of the values of 1793. The revenue due from the *zemindar* can never be increased, but he may rack-rent his "tenants" by raising their "rents" every twelve years, a privilege of which, through 138 years, he has mercilessly availed himself. Under these permanent settlements on an average about a quarter of the rent goes to the Government as land-revenue : three fourths remain to the *zemindar*. In other parts of the North (notably the United Province), assessments are made every thirty years, and the *zemindar* retains 55 per cent. as "rent," paying the remainder as tax. The variable assessment is incomparably the more reasonable system, but it, too, works harshly in a period, like the present, of falling prices. A tax which was moderate, if the assessment was made in the early post-War years, has become flagrantly oppressive to-day.<sup>1</sup> Finally, notably throughout the South, over an area which is approximately half the Peninsula, the peasant-cultivator is virtually the owner, and pays land-revenue (some consider it a tax, others a rent) direct to the State, without the intervention of a *zemindar*. In these regions the only landlords are usurers, or *kulaks* (to use the Russian word), who have turned debtors into tenants.

This evolution, due to British policy, of the tax-farmer—

<sup>1</sup> Lord Ripon proposed that assessments should vary only as prices vary, but the Home Government vetoed this reform. If gold cannot be stabilised, the land charges ought to vary according to an annual price index.

the "publican" of Roman times—into a landlord, will be the worst of our legacies to the villages of Northern India, for it will survive our direct responsibility for their government. In function and outlook this landlord remains a tax-farmer. He draws a tribute, and he does nothing else. He has laid out no capital on his "estate": he does not attempt to manage it scientifically: nor is he often by his example an influence for agricultural progress.<sup>1</sup> He is often a harsh overlord: he exacts, over and above the money rent, sundry servitudes in kind; and like the usurer he often stoops to petty trickery. Since he has the power to exact a price from the tenant for his permission to make improvements, he acts as a formidable obstacle to economic progress; nor has the legislation of recent years proved effective in giving the tenant security. He wields great political power, and disposes of the votes of his richer tenants—the poor have none. This oppression the early British rulers of India introduced, and to this day the landlord is the object of peculiar official solicitude. All "agricultural incomes" are in India exempt from income-tax. This mercy was not devised from any concern for the tenant, whose income, save in a few exceptional cases, is far below the limit of exemption. It spares the great incomes of the landlords, which sometimes run into princely figures. The great landowners, moreover, are actually represented as a special interest, like the European merchants, in Legislative bodies. Not even to a Labour Government did it occur to give their impoverished tenants special representation.

<sup>1</sup> If the reader suspects my Socialist bias, he may consult the Marquis of Linlithgow's Report, p. 425, or such an orthodox economist as Mrs. Anstey, who calls the *zemindars* (p. 99) "mere parasites who batten on the product of the cultivators."

To what proportion of the peasant's income this tribute to the landlord amounts it would be interesting to know. It comes to three times the land revenue in Bengal, and to a little more than the land revenue in the United Provinces. In the Punjab, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> it may amount to three times the value of the peasant's net income from his land. On this subject, the Nationalist Opposition has been silent, perhaps because its upper ranks are often linked by ties of blood and business to the landlord class. It prefers to assail the land revenue. Some part of that revenue—much too small a part, it is true—is spent on purposes which benefit the peasant : from the landlord's tribute not an anna comes back to him in service. Our first attempt to analyse the distribution of Indian wealth has brought us in sight of several indigenous parasites, certainly the usurer and the landlord, possibly the middleman also, who succeed, it seems, in eating up a part of the produce of the peasant's toil several times greater than that which the Government of India appropriates.

### *"The Drain"*

NATIONALIST criticism, inevitably and naturally, has been concentrated not on the social aspects of the mal-distribution of wealth in India, which have their parallels in other lands, but on the peculiarity of India's case. The peasant pays a tribute, which in part explains his dire poverty, to landlord and usurer: but they are Indians : what they grab unearned remains within the country. But does not the Indian nation, as a unit,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 49.

also pay what may fairly be called a tribute to the land which conquered and controls her?

The fact is there : the payments go out. They are withdrawn from India ; they do not continue to circulate there, paying Indians for goods and services as the tributes of the landlord and usurer do. That cannot be gainsaid. What can be urged on the other side is that these charges are payments to England or to Englishmen for services rendered. To that Indians counter with the reply that the services are overpaid and that they are performed without India's invitation and against her will. There arises, when we have heard both sides, the further question whether this "drain" of India's wealth plays a major part in explaining her poverty.

The classical controversy over the "drain" turned within narrow limits, for it concerned the so-called Home Charges ; the payments, that is to say, which the Indian Government annually makes in London. The major charges are for the management of the external debt, with the interest on the capital cost of railways and irrigation works : after these come smaller charges for part of the expenses of the India Office in London, army pensions, allowances paid to British officials and soldiers absent on furlough, stores purchased in London and some minor items. The total sum, at the turn of the century, was about seventeen million pounds and has since ranged from thirty to thirty-five million pounds. The earlier figure was approximately that of the land revenue, which measured it for Indian eyes.<sup>1</sup>

The answer, in so far as the productive debt is concerned, is easy. The railways and irrigation works have

<sup>1</sup> See *India in the Victorian Age*, by Romesh Dutt, p. xiv.

been of great service to India : the necessary capital could not have been raised in India, or if raised there, must have paid a greatly higher interest rate. I think, however, that an Indian Government would have known how to raise this money. A democracy would have done it by a patriotic appeal ; a despot would have tortured a few rich men to encourage the rest. To the criticism over pensions and furlough allowances, there is the general answer that over the greater part of the period of British rule Indians lacked the training and capacity to perform the services which Englishmen rendered. If it be answered that the Indianisation of the services ought to have begun much earlier and proceeded much faster, there is the partial reply that even so the saving would cover only a portion of this expenditure. This, however, ignores the economic difference between pensions paid in England and pensions consumed in India.

The Indian attack is morally successful when it points to the debt incurred to compensate the East India Company for the loss of its privileges after the Mutiny. The Home Government, which resumed them for itself, was certainly the party to this transaction which ought to have paid. India was a passive and indifferent object in this transfer of power. Again, Indians have an easy case to argue when they point to the many wars, some unnecessary, some iniquitous and some with no imaginable relation to any Indian interest, for which in part they have had to pay. India has paid in this way for her own reconquest after the Mutiny : an indemnity, as it were, for her defeat. The Opium Wars opened China to British, not to Indian trade. Hong Kong was not annexed to India. What Indian aspired to the conquest of Burmah ? Who

now would defend the First Afghan War ? If a part of the Indian Army could be spared for an expedition to Abyssinia, then manifestly it was, for purely Indian purposes, to that extent too large. And so, from one item to another one might go on.<sup>1</sup> It is often answered that in fact these charges no longer figure in the account, or only to a negligible amount ; the debts have been wiped out. That is no answer : year after year they did reduce the surplus available for India's own development.

In morals, the Indian advocates are entitled on these counts to a verdict—if this be a moral world. An Empire took India by force, and used her for its purposes. If, however, we are dealing with the economic problem of Indian poverty the case is not so simple. Foolish and unjust wars and mean reckonings there have been. Would India have escaped such wars, if Clive had never been born ? The Indian argument assumes that the Peninsula, without the British, would have been a paradise of peace in which armaments and taxation to finance bloodshed would have been unknown. It might have weltered to this day in internecine war : but if some strong native power had unified it, would it have escaped the military burdens which Japan must bear ? She must pay for a navy : India escapes that charge. The broad economic defence for all these military charges, and also for the police, is that they are details in an immensely valuable contribution. British

<sup>1</sup> The Great War does not figure among these Home Charges. India, in so far as she had at this time a will which she could freely express, made two "gifts" amounting to about 150 million pounds to the Empire. These great sums were raised in India by rupee loans : the interest is not "drained" away. Oddly enough, India did catch the War fever and even Mr. Gandhi, in spite of his pacifism, made a recruiting tour in Gujarat. The "gifts" may at the time have been made willingly, influenced by an inflated expectation of favours to come.

rule brought a new security, internal and (save on the North-West fringe) external peace, immunity from brigandage, civil war and invasion. That is an invaluable economic gain which means something in income for every Indian and something, in the opportunity to accumulate wealth, for the whole nation. On the economic plane the answer may well be successful : freed from these British military charges it is possible that India would have been not richer but poorer. What stings is the sense that even this security was imposed : the laurels with the pensions went overseas.

This controversy over the "drain" is still alive. Congress, as I write, is compiling its estimates for an indemnity which shall compensate India for the unjust charges of the past. On some of these counts the British Government, if it is wise, will satisfy Indian public opinion. The Empire utilises India as a convenient reserve of military power to back its general policy in the East, and maintains in this strategical basis an army which may be used not merely to defend India (or to hold her down), but may be flung at need into Persia, Mesopotamia or China, or turned against Russia. For this convenience, as even the Simon Report recognised, the Empire rather than India should pay. If India has gained in security through the uninvited presence of our armies, the Empire has gained mightily in prestige and power.

THESE arises out of this somewhat sterile controversy over the past the urgent question whether the whole machine of government, civil and military, is more costly than India can bear ; or to put it in another way, whether India is gravely overtaxed ? Mr. Gandhi, with his instinct for simplifying knotty problems, has summed up the popular attitude in the twin demands that the cost of the army and the civil service should be cut by half, and the land revenue by as much, while the salt tax should be abolished. The land revenue has no longer its old importance in the Indian Budget : between 1883 and 1923 it fell from 53 to 20 per cent. of the total revenue from taxes. It is, however, as important as ever in its social effects. The poor of the villages are taxed only on their land and their salt, for they do not consume imported goods subject to customs : if they pay on cotton piece goods they need not do so, for as Mr. Gandhi would say, they can wear home-spun : if they pay also on toddy, again, as he would say, they ought not to drink it. The land tax is involved in a muddle of insincere controversy. Is it tax or rent ? If one answers " tax," then why should the cultivators of the South escape rent ? If one answers " rent," then why should the North be bled by the *zemindars* also ? Again, is it of much use to reduce this " tax," if the *zemindar* continues to levy his heavier tribute ? The hated salt tax will, of course, go so soon as India controls her Budget. It is difficult to ascertain the real burden of the land tax upon income, for it varies immensely from province to province and with the date of the assessment and the level of prices. One may, however, quote Mr. Darling's estimate that in the Punjab it

absorbs 20 per cent. of the net income from the land.<sup>1</sup> With prices as they stand to-day it must be much more than this. The plain fact, when one has seen the poorer villages, is that any tax whatever is intolerable and unjustifiable—if this be a tax. If it is rent, then the *zemindar* must be swept away, and if that cannot be done without some compensation over a brief term of years, then England—if this were a moral world—rather than India should pay it, for she invented this parasite. A less drastic solution would be to tax him heavily on his unearned income which to-day goes tax-free. From a due development of income tax it would be possible, even without a reduction of expenditure, to satisfy Mr. Gandhi, by freeing the poorest of the poor entirely from taxation. No civilised State will tax an income too low to provide a bare subsistence, and that is the case of the majority of these peasants. We must reckon the incidence of taxation (though not necessarily its total amount) among the factors in the distribution of India's wealth which explain the general poverty—among them, indeed, but far behind usury and land tenure.

On the subject of expenditure it is enough to quote the official reckoning, which shows that 26 per cent., taking the provincial and central expenditure together, goes to the military services, 6 per cent. to education and 1 per cent. to public health.<sup>2</sup> When one analyses this military

<sup>1</sup> *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, pp. 10, 248.

<sup>2</sup> I have given these percentages as they stand in the official year book, *India in 1928-29* (p. 223). They seem to me, however, seriously misleading. Among expenditure in this reckoning is included that of departments which produce a net revenue, railways, irrigation, forests and land revenue. If these items are excluded, then the military expenditure amounts to 33 per cent., and that on the two social services (education and health) together to 9 per cent.

expenditure the greater part of it is evidently due to the fear of another Mutiny. It is only recently that Indians have been admitted to full commissioned rank ; even now they are not trusted with heavy artillery. The native army is not only officered by Englishmen : it is systematically held in check by a high proportion of British troops (one in three), who alone are trusted with the more formidable arms. When one adds that a British soldier costs four times what an Indian soldier costs, and a British officer as much as twenty-four Indian soldiers, one has the elements of an explanation. It is a grave mistake to suppose that the Indian Government is extravagant. On the contrary it is excessively economical. It manages the debt according to the severest canons of sound finance. Its instincts are invariably for deflation. It increases taxation when compelled to do so with sincere reluctance : it cuts down expenditure in times of stress, even on essential productive services, with an approach to enthusiasm : at the moment it is swinging the axe of retrenchment with devastating fury. But given political realities, it dare not cut down military charges, for it dare not go much further in arming India, or (what comes to the same thing) in withdrawing the British garrison. For the same reason it dare not cut down the cost (9 per cent.) of police, jails and justice, the first line of defence in coping with disaffection.

The costs of the general administration are swollen by the salaries of British civil servants. Able and conscientious men (as these civilians are) may expect some compensation if they expatriate themselves, to live often in lonely and unhealthy stations. But their salaries are out of all proportion to the standards of the Indian educated

classes. Europeans in India, it seemed to me, live at a needlessly high level of expense : the reason is less the climate than their sense of the prestige of their white skins. Governors and other high personages are expected to maintain a pompous establishment which offends the better strata of Indian opinion, though possibly the pace was originally set by the luxury of Indian potentates. A Viceroy who had dared to live, if not precisely as an ascetic, yet with the thought of India's poverty ever present with him, would have won India's respect as pomp will never win it. These are the main reasons—distrust and a false sense of the conqueror's prestige—why, year after year, the Finance Member faces an inelastic revenue, mortgaged in advance to the indispensable costs of a perennial conquest. Even so, a bolder way of thinking, a more imaginative sense of what even a modest expenditure can effect to promote industry, foster agriculture, and lay the foundations of intelligence and health, could partially have solved this problem. The rulers of India seem never to have realised that if they could double the income of the country, the present and, indeed, a much higher expenditure could be cheerfully borne. If the little that Lord Curzon was able to do in this direction had begun a generation earlier, if we had gradually raised the expenditure on industrial and agricultural research and organisation, on housing, health and education, till the present miserable percentages were doubled and quadrupled, we might have found that a prosperous and contented India could have been trusted to handle even artillery without British regiments to watch her.

THE controversy over the "drain" is commonly argued on narrow political lines. The Home Charges (justifiable as in part they are) form, however, a small portion of the annual tribute to which India must submit. A people living in the Middle Ages has been penetrated by the commerce, industry and capital of a nation formed by the industrial revolution. It erected its factories, laid out its plantations, sunk coal pits and built railways and ports on the basis of a labour supply which is still exceedingly cheap, even when allowance is made for its physical weakness and inefficiency. In the cotton mills of Bombay Presidency it has been reckoned that 34 Indians do the work of 12 Lancashire hands for 60 per cent. of their wage-bill.<sup>1</sup> In turning this opportunity to advantage, European capitalists had behind them a friendly government which, until our own day, rather retarded than promoted the emergence of this backward people from its economically primitive phase, and only recently, and still inadequately, began to protect its workers from the grosser forms of exploitation. In addition to manufacture (in which Indian competition is even now formidable only in the cotton trade), the British forces of penetration included modern banking and sea-transport. The profits of this exploitation under favourable conditions often put a strain on one's powers of belief. Coal mines have been known to pay 100 and 120 per cent. on a daily wage of 8d. Out of 51 jute mills, 32

<sup>1</sup> By the delegates of the International Textile Unions who visited India in 1926-27. See *Das Werkstädtige Indien* by Schrader and Furtwängler, p. 266. But other authorities rate Indian efficiency much higher. The management of the Tata Steel Works rates one Indian worker at two-thirds of a European.

paid as much as 100 per cent. in one or more years between 1918 and 1927 : 29 never paid less than 20 per cent., and 10 never less than 40 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

With sufficiently full figures before me I reckon that during the early post-War years, for every £100 which these mills paid in profits to their shareholders in Scotland they paid £12 in wages to their Indian workers.<sup>2</sup> India is, indeed, the brightest jewel in the British Crown.

There is a simple but accurate way of measuring the total profits of this relationship between the advanced Empire and the mediæval dependency. The balance of trade should reveal them. India's exports always exceed her imports : the amount of the excess should disclose what she pays as debtor to her Western creditors, together with the profits which foreign industrialists, bankers, merchants and carriers make on her territory for their shareholders and sleeping partners overseas. This total does not include what they enjoy or re-invest upon her soil. All of these profits and all of this interest are eventually transferred in goods. The tendency fortunately is for the gap between exports and imports to narrow. Over a period of five fairly normal post-War years (1923-24 to 1927-28) it averaged 80½ million pounds (109.4 crores of rupees), rather less than the usurer's unconscionable gains ; nearly double the military charges ; between two and three times the land revenue.

Much of this tribute is payment for honest and valuable services : much of it is the reward of enterprise, knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Anstey, quoting *Capital*, p. 282 note. One would like to invite the comments of respectable English critics who condemn Indian usurers, in this record.

<sup>2</sup> A similar reckoning will be found in *Das Werkstattige Indien*, p. 103 —that profits amount to six or eight times the wages bill.

and skill which India does not or did not, possess. Much of it, in short, is inevitable. Much of it as certainly represents ruthless exploitation. All of it is the price which India pays for her backward economic institutions, her obsolete social and religious thinking and her neglect of science. Like the Home Charges it is withdrawn from circulation in India. Like them, also, it has been mightily swollen by the recent appreciation of gold. It seems to represent an average interest rate of about 12 per cent. on the total investment of British capital in India (public debt, limited companies, etc.), usually estimated at from £600 to £700 millions. Even with this handicap, had India used the gold which she annually imports and hoards, to buy modern machinery, to hire expert management, and to organise her agriculture and her rural industries on a rational and humane plan, she might long ago have escaped from this tribute. That, however, is a theoretical possibility only : actually, only a self-governing nation could generate the energy and control the organisation which this work of intellectual and economic liberation demanded. For these reasons India is poor.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK

ONE no longer discusses whether Indian self-government is possible or desirable : it is inevitable. History, in its march, has overtaken us. If we did not know, two years ago, that destiny had made her decision, we know it now. The chronicler who looks back upon these two years, may realise that the lesson could not have been learned at a lower cost. It seemed, on the eve of Christmas in 1929, that peace with the Congress movement and a prospect of orderly constitutional advance were within our grasp. Lord Irwin, with the prestige of his winning personality and his limpid sincerity, had all but persuaded Indians that they might trust our goodwill. He had used for the first time in a binding official utterance the magic word "Dominion," when he said that the attainment of this status was the goal of British policy in India. The promise was undated and undefined, but it made, none the less, its impression on Indians, for with it went at last the offer of that Round Table Conference, between the leaders of two equal nations, which Indians had long demanded in vain. The fatal error committed in naming the All-English Simon Commission to sit in judgment on India's fitness to govern herself, had at last been undone. Mr. Gandhi, pressed though he was, by the ardent Left Wing of his movement, to stiffen his attitude in the face of these concessions, decided to ask only one question—a fair and proper question. If

he accepted the offer of the Conference, might he have in advance at least a private assurance that the Labour Government would enter it, resolved to frame a Dominion constitution, albeit with transitory safeguards. The pledge was not given—it may be that in such matters a private pledge would have been improper. History worked itself out, and through a year of struggle India demonstrated her will to achieve what Lord Irwin and Mr. MacDonald could not promise.

Before this demonstration British public opinion was not prepared for such a promise. It was ready to go as far as the Simon Report somewhat later advised it to go, but not further. It had no perception that it was necessary to concede responsible government at the Centre as well as in the provinces. If Mr. MacDonald had then given publicly the pledge which Mr. Gandhi sought, it is probable that both the opposition parties would have repudiated it, and brought his Government down. The historian may have to say that given this gap between the utmost which the Empire would concede and the least which India would accept, this painful year of bloodless rebellion and unavailing suppression was necessary. Mr. MacDonald, if he regarded himself as the spokesman of Parliament rather than the leader of a fighting party, could not speak the word that would have averted it. Mr. Gandhi, on that showing, was obliged to supply the proof which political logic required. He did supply it. He proved what few suspected—the virtual unanimity of the Indian nation behind him, the ardour of the women, the readiness of peasants to stake their land itself for the common cause, the steadiness even of unwarlike races to endure. Lancashire felt the brunt of this demonstration,

and before the year of testing was over, British public opinion understood what it had failed to divine. Whether we thought first of India's good, or of our own credit before a deeply interested world, we could not contemplate the indefinite prolongation of this struggle. The Conference, though only the spokesmen of the small moderate minority had attended it, yielded the substance of Mr. Gandhi's demand : the truce was its natural sequel.

Whether the renewed Conference fails or succeeds, our direct responsibility for the administration of India has come to its inevitable end. A nation has at last demanded what its self-respect required. That would have happened in our relationship with India, even if we had had the tact to conceal our sense of our racial superiority, though the evolution in that case would have been happier, and more gradual. As it is, thanks to the arrogance of our manners, we have forced every Indian to feel that it is degradation to submit to our rule. We had many ways of evoking this passionate temper of revolt, but each in our own way we did it, from Lord Birkenhead who named the Simon Commission, and Mr. Baldwin, who introduced its members to India as " God's Englishmen," down to the coarse-grained employer who cuffs his coolies.<sup>1</sup> The mind

<sup>1</sup> This type has grown less numerous in recent years, and his behaviour is more restrained. But one meets this person still. Within an hour of embarking on the P. & O. liner for Bombay, a lady of considerable assurance, who told me that she had lived eighteen years in Poona, flung at me the question, " Why don't they shoot Gandhi ? " She went on to explain that " the whole trouble in India has come about, because the Government won't let us beat our servants. It's the only thing they understand." Arrived in Bombay, I heard this story from an Indian lady, who bore a name deeply honoured in the last century, of which by her carriage and her intelligence she was worthy. She was about to get into a first-class carriage, in which there were two English ladies. One of them, Lady X, came to the door and

of India, in consequence, was busied above all else with her status. It is significant that Indians rarely use the word Dominion alone : they talk always of " Dominion Status." This " inferiority complex " which we had been at such pains to create, took occasionally in the older generation a rather simple-minded form. " A certain man," so runs an Indian folk-tale, " had a pony and a horse. He treated them well, and fed them both on *gram* (the equivalent of oats). But the pony grew tired of hearing himself called by this name, and at last he said to the man : " You needn't give me any more *gram* : hay will do : only don't go on calling me pony." Fortunately for India, Mr. Gandhi is in himself too free and too sure for such littleness. With him the central issue is the economic question : he will not forego the *gram*. His economics may seem to us mediæval, but his attitude rests on the sound instinct that there will be no end to poverty in the village, and no transformation of the peasant's lot, until India has a Government which must answer to the Indian people, and to them alone. Mr. Gandhi is in his own way a realist : he sees the constitutional problem in terms of the Budget.

The strongest impression that I carried away from India is that happiness and self-respect, with decent administration, can be secured for the villages only when the

said gruffly, " You can't come in here." " And why ? " asked the Indian. " Because you're black and I'm white," said Lady X. " I prefer my colour to your manners," was the neat retort.

Other stories of this kind were more brutal and less amusing. A few years ago an Indian intellectual, a highly educated and attractive young man of slight physique, entered a first-class railway carriage in which were an Englishman and his wife. The Englishman ordered him out. He replied with the usual Indian gentleness, and finally, since the train had started, offered to change carriages at the next station. The Englishman opened the door and flung him out on the line. He was badly bruised. The strangest part of this story is that he maintained that he felt no hatred.

police and the minor officials are answerable to Indian scrutiny. Moving about with Indians in these villages, I caught a glimpse of what Government means, not so much to the educated classes, whose minds are free, as to the simple man in *dhoti* and loin-cloth, who knows neither English nor law. In its most beneficent incarnation it means water. I saw it at its best in the irrigation colonies of the Punjab, where the engineer has turned desert into garden, and in the villages tall men and stately bullocks reap rich harvests beside the canals. But the Punjab is a favoured province, for it breeds men and horses for the army. Even there it was pitiable to hear Sikh giants, whose great hands made mine look like a boy's, complain of the petty oppressions of the police. Canal water, which authority may withhold or bestow, made from the earliest times, in Egypt and Sumeria, a sure foundation for autocracy. It does so still. When I asked these stalwart yeomen whether Congress had much hold in their district, they answered : "Our water would be cut off, if we joined it." Their fear may have been excessive : enough that they felt it.

The moment one left a big city, which has its daily paper and its public meetings, one realised that Government meant, in the concrete, for the peasant, the police in the nearest *thana* (station). In this incarnation it is not an amiable power. It carries a *lathi*, which it will use roughly. It must be bribed—a charge that one heard incessantly, with wearisome corroboration, against Indian officers as well as men, from gentle and simple alike, from countrymen and lawyers, and even from non-official Englishmen. That, the reader may feel, is a poor omen for self-government, for these men are Indians. On the

contrary, it is a great part of the case for self-government. The Indian police inherits the Moghul tradition : it has not begun to think of itself as the Indian people's servant. It never will so think of itself, until it has to answer to an Indian Watch Committee, or at least to an Indian Minister. At present it is the servant of an autocracy : its function is to overawe the people into submission. British officials, however vigilant, cannot bring about this change of mind, least of all to-day. They are few and busy : the routine of office duty occupies too much of their time : they can never go about incognito, for they can never discard the uniform of their white skins. Rightly or wrongly the peasants believe that it is useless to complain. A determined man may, at great expense, win a case against a police-officer who has wronged him, by carrying it to the higher courts, which enjoy universal respect. But even then it does not follow that the guilty officer will be punished or dismissed. I had the curiosity to collect the legal records of cases of this kind, and some illuminating personal experiences came to me also in my wanderings. The British official tradition in India is one of high integrity and devotion to duty. But as I looked at it from the angle of the Indian peasant, it had a fault which all but neutralised these virtues. It lives on prestige. This Government cannot shake off the age-long tradition of autocracy, that it is above the people. It dare not admit a fault, or rebuke a subordinate for excess of zeal. It exacts loyalty from these Indian officials, and it owes them loyalty in return. It will not dismiss a reliable police-officer, even when a judge has censured him in open court, merely because he has ill-used peasants. This is what any student of human nature would expect, though the grossness of

some of these cases startled me. The British official in India is doubly aloof ; first, because in social life he mixes little with unofficial Indians, and secondly because in office hours he is surrounded by Indian subordinates who may have an interest in misleading him. This handicap, always serious, makes good or even tolerable government impossible, so soon as the nationalist resistance attains the proportions of a mass movement. To-day the British official moves and works among a hostile people, and his Indian subordinates are subjected to a rigid social boycott. In these conditions, government becomes a sort of civil war.

### *The Round Table Draft*

**W**HEN with this background one approaches the draft of the Constitution which the Round Table Conference worked out, the predominant feeling is hope. Here is a framework, within which a free India may shape her future. Here in principle, alike at the Centre and in the Provinces, is responsible self-government. The advance, when one measures these proposals against any expectations which one might have formed, even two years ago, is startling. Nor does a more leisurely scrutiny of details, though it suggests grave anxieties, wholly destroy this first impression. India, if she should, with some indispensable amendments, accept this Constitution, will work and breathe and grow in a new atmosphere. At last, after five generations, an Indian Government, a Government with a dark skin, will rule again in Delhi. How much, in a new sense of dignity and a consciousness of liberated power, that will mean to every Indian, but

above all to the younger generation, it is difficult for us, who have always been our own masters, to measure. The stigma of racial inferiority is all but erased. The paralysis of a nation's will is ended. Within this Constitution, over a vast range of her daily life, India will make her own dispositions. She will feel no longer that her destiny is in the hand of strangers ; nor in tones, alternately of listlessness and of exasperation, will she be able, for all that is amiss, to blame this alien power, as far beyond her control as the monsoon. In two instances, in our own lifetime, we have seen what the removal of a stamp of inferiority can achieve to raise the mental stature of human beings. Women, in our own country, have gained alike in ambition and capacity by their liberation. A repressed class in Russia has become the daring architect of a grandiose future. We may witness, in India also, when its people feel that they stand erect, a great release of creative energies. Looking around them, they will see opportunities where there were closed doors, difficulties to be overcome where once impossibilities confronted them, an India to be shaped and re-created by their own effort and thought, which was a conqueror's possession. They exaggerated, it is true, their own impotence in the past : there was much which they might have done that they did not do. It will be well if they exaggerate also their command over the future. By that illusion men grow to greatness.

The future of this plan for India is rather a problem in human dynamics than in the niceties of constitutional law. Englishmen who knew the India that was, tend to assume that the India of to-morrow will be its replica. A nation that comes to power is changed by the act. It finds new leaders : its ambitions expand : the tempo of its life is

quickened, and it achieves overnight what in dull epochs would be the work of years. That happened during the year of struggle : it ought to go on happening through the first decade of the new era. My own knowledge of India is slight, but elsewhere I have seen liberated nations at work. I ask myself whether, in their planning of the future, British Ministers and officials, or the authors of the Simon Report have made allowance for this quickened tempo. One does not wish to check it : it means life. Yet on this question of pace the whole attitude of India towards the scheme will turn.

The main obstacle to the acceptance of this Draft is in its provisions over finance. Indians say, that while it professes to concede responsible government at the Centre, it withdraws in effect nearly 85 per cent. of the Central Expenditure from their control. One begins with the army, which accounts (on different methods of reckoning) for 26 or 33 per cent. of the whole expenditure of Provinces and Centre together. Then comes the debt, and one goes on to the cost of the civil administration, where the salaries and pensions of the covenanted services are inevitably protected. Within the limits set by these reservations, the scope for any constructive use of finance in the work of building the nation is painfully restricted. The masses at present are too heavily taxed : one would wish to hope that a self-governing India will draw much more of its revenue from income tax : but dare it or ought it to increase the total burden of taxation ? If there can be no reduction in the cost of the army, the debt and in administrative salaries, the new India will start with the same inelastic Budget which has hampered development in the past, and there will remain for education, health

and the fostering of agriculture and industry little more than the miserable residue (7 or 9 per cent. by the different reckonings) available to-day. The effort of Congress to reduce these fixed charges springs from a motive more deserving of sympathy than a natural wish to escape expense : unless it can succeed here, its hands will be tied in the effort to end the misery of the villages by re-organising agriculture, banishing preventable disease, and establishing universal education. We must open our minds to give a fair hearing to the arguments by which Congress has convinced itself that some of the items which went to make up the debt ought never to have been charged to India's account.

The most hopeful field for economy is the military expenditure. There are here three possibilities. In the first place, we are on the eve of a general Disarmament Conference. Sanguine experts look forward to a general scaling down of the cost of defence by 25 per cent.<sup>1</sup> If that should be possible, then India to this extent should share in the common gain. In the second place, the scale and cost of Indian armaments is fixed by certain fears, which we usually drape in euphemisms. In so far as the Indian army is a strategical reserve, for use at our discretion throughout the East, in China for example, or (for that is certainly part of the calculation) against Russia, then the Empire (as the Simon Report recognised) ought to make a contribution towards its maintenance. It is, however, chiefly an insurance against various internal risks, ranging from communal riots, and the possibility

<sup>1</sup> Does this mean, I wonder, a clear reduction by a quarter, after allowance has been made for the fall of prices ? Since 1929 the cost of everything that armies and fleets must buy has fallen by 32 per cent.

of attacks on the European cantonments, up to another Mutiny. The grant of self-government is meaningless, unless it has diminished and, indeed, abolished this risk. Against local disorders precautions must still be taken. But the old fear of a mass rising against foreign rule, which should spread to the Indian regiments, is no longer rational, if our intention is honest that India henceforward shall govern herself. The distrust which was held to justify this numerous and expensive British contingent, has become an anachronism. An immediate reduction should be possible, accompanied by an undertaking to review the position again after (say) five experimental years.

Finally comes the question of the pace at which "Indianisation" is to proceed, both in the army, and in the civil service. At the rate now contemplated, a quarter of a century will elapse before even the few Indian battalions selected for experiment are wholly officered by Indians. There is to be no speeding up of the usual slow process of promotion by seniority, and no young men will attain positions of responsibility. That is not the spirit of a revolutionary time, and, unless we check it by pedantry and caution, the first years of India's new era ought, in the best sense of the word, to be a revolutionary time—a period which stimulates men to rise above themselves, an epoch of quick change and generous creation. Carnot and Trosky created their armies with less than a tenth of this allowance of time ; they scoffed at seniority and picked young men ; but they won victories. If India were free to use the impulse of patriotism to build up her own army, with the technical aid of young and sympathetic English soldiers, the thing could be done in a few years,

but only if the spirit and atmosphere of this army were such that young Indian patriots of the educated class would consent to serve in it. If it is to remain an old-world army, trusting to habit, discipline and pay for its cohesion, rather than to an idea, then doubtless much time and endless routine are needed for its formation : one cannot turn men into automata quickly.

### *The Federal Idea*

**A**FTER this problem of finance, vital because it will decide whether India will have the means to organise and educate herself out of her present poverty, the pivot of this Draft is its federal scheme. In almost any form federalism promises some gain. The division into British provinces and Indian States answers to no real differences of race, language, religion or culture. The Indian nation, were this separation to continue, would feel herself incomplete. Here is the promise of a political unity, such as she knew only once or twice, and then only for a brief span, in her long history. One struggles to give to this aspect of the plan its due value, but unity has been won at a heavy price. The Princes fought hard to avoid the surrender of any substantial part of their sovereign rights. In so far as they come into the federal scheme they gain much, and abandon nothing. They will now have, what they never had before, a share in determining the policy of India, in all that concerns tariffs and communications. But their influence has narrowed the scope of federal legislation within dangerously narrow limits. As the Draft stands, the Federal

Legislature will have no power to set standards, to prescribe any minimum of civilisation, or even to guarantee to all Indians respect for their elementary civil rights. In certain of its most questionable features the Constitution of the United States has been taken as a model. The checks and balances of its elaborate mechanism of political frustration, designed to prevent a majority from achieving anything in the way of fundamental change—all these are duly copied in the two chambers, and the provision for their election at different times. But of the nobler spirit of the American Constitution, its bold assertion of the citizen's fundamental rights, there is, as the Draft now stands, no trace. A federation will have a living unity, if it embodies some idea of the terms under which men should live together within it. This Indian Federation rests upon no social ideal whatever : it has no foundation of citizen rights. Within it there will continue all the anomalies of to-day, and it will have no power to abate them.<sup>1</sup> In Bombay there are certain freedoms which the courts will secure : in Patiala there are none of these things. Under this Federation, a Maharajah may continue to do as he will with his own, and that is the whole range of his subjects' lives, their honour, their property and their liberty of expression and association.

If the Draft brings no gain, through a definition of basic rights, to the citizens of the despotically governed Indian States, it involves for the provinces of British India a serious risk in their social advance. Labour legislation is a provincial, and up to a point, a central

<sup>1</sup> It is proposed that there shall be a declaration in the Constitution of the equal rights of the various communities in the exercise of their religions, but apparently this will not include other fundamental civil rights. Report, p. 46, §3.

but not a federal subject. It is intelligible that the Princes should have resisted the efforts of the spokesmen of Indian Labour at the Conference, who wished to make labour a federal subject. To legalise Trade Unions, to regulate hours and conditions of work, perhaps one day to fix minimum wage rates, and, above all, to render such reforms effective by extending inspection to the Princes' dominions, would have seemed to all but the enlightened few among them an intolerable infringement of their autocracy. The effect will be to hamper labour legislation, as it is hampered in the United States. To escape the relatively satisfactory legislation of Massachusetts, the textile industry is transferring itself to Southern States, which have no code for the protection of women and children. The same thing might happen in India. Even if it did not in fact happen on a great scale—and few of the States could offer to a highly organised industry the facilities which it can enjoy in the Bombay Presidency—obstructive interests would play upon the fear that it might happen. The risk that minor industries may migrate to the States to avoid the regulations of British India is more serious—indeed, in the case of ginning factories this is already happening.<sup>1</sup> A Province with a progressive Ministry would be hampered at every turn by the fear of handicapping its own industries in their competition with those of more backward States, and this will be true not only of its labour legislation in the narrower sense of the word, but also of what it may do to improve housing and the condition of the masses generally. To this defect in the Draft Constitution the Whitley Commission has drawn attention in an emphatic

<sup>1</sup> Whitley, p. 473.

passage (pp. 457-462). Both federal and provincial legislatures should have power to legislate, but the provincial or States legislation must not impair or infringe that of the Federation.

### *The Princes*

THE Draft makes no proposal for any uniformity in the system of representation by which the Federal Legislature will be composed. The provinces of British India will elect their representatives on a franchise which will be laid down, and will be the same for all. The Princes will do as they please.<sup>1</sup> Some of them who have consultative chambers (not even the most liberal have yet conceded responsible government) may possibly permit some process of election. It is fairly certain that most of them will nominate their own delegations, even if they should go through some motion of consulting their purely decorative Councils. The Prince, in short, will send his own servants, who will vote and speak as he requires them. There can be, while the Princes remain autocrats, no representation of their subjects' interests or opinions.

This would be sufficiently objectionable, if the Princes were, in fact, independent. A very few of the best of them nearly deserve that name. Mysore, for example, is so well governed, and has under its progressive Prince a population so numerous and contented, that it offers no pretext for intervention from Delhi. It is otherwise with most of

1 "Their Highnesses made it clear that in their opinion the method by which the States' representatives should be chosen will be a matter for the States themselves."—Report of the Conference, p. 8.

the Princes. Their administration is commonly so backward and inefficient, their misuse of their revenues for personal aggrandisement so scandalous, their oppression of their subjects so flagrant, that at any time the Political Department at Delhi, or the British Resident at the Prince's Court would have ample ground for intervention. In practice this power of supervision is little used. The Prince enjoys a certain undefined latitude to indulge his oppressions and his vices, but scrupulous loyalty is exacted from him, and a ceremonial deference towards British officials who represent the Paramount Power. It is a feudal relationship, which fails to secure even tolerable government in the Prince's dominions, but does ensure discipline. For any misconduct which offends Delhi the penalty may be deposition.<sup>1</sup> The Prince is a tenant-at-will, and is very careful in all his political acts to consider the susceptibilities and follow the promptings of Delhi. This is so well understood that the proposal to include in the Federal Chambers a large representation of the Princes which will be approximately a third of the whole number of members, brought about an astonishing rally of Conservative and official opinion in favour of a federal scheme. To win Conservative support for responsible government at the Centre for British India alone, would have been difficult or impossible : that would have meant the control of policy by an elected Assembly. The Princes will dilute its democracy, they will take over the part which the contingent of official members plays to-day.

<sup>1</sup> The sympathies of Congress were much exercised on behalf of a small Prince who was dispossessed on the ground that he had shown disrespect to a visiting British official. The disrespect lay in this, that he received the personage in *khaddar* (homespun), a garb which indicates nationalist sentiments. I had this story, however, only from the Indian side.

Their severest critics will not accuse them of democratic leanings, and one may safely assume that whenever the Viceroy, as the representative of the Home Government, holds on any item of current business a strong opinion, the princely contingent will be found to share it. The surrender of power to India is not so complete as it seems. The Federal Assembly will look like an Indian body, but within it a solid, immovable contingent of "King's men," subject to discipline, will be at call to over-ride the will of the Indian people. A majority, indeed, the Princes will not possess in either House, but with the more conservative groups from British India to back them, their votes (as high a figure as 50 per cent. for the Senate, and 40 per cent. for the Lower House has been suggested) should usually suffice to ensure a solid Conservative majority in the Federal Legislature. One general election may follow another, but unless British India is virtually unanimous, a progressive majority will be unattainable. The princely contingent may refrain (though this is uncertain) from voting on issues which concern British India alone. They might not, for example, directly defeat a proposal to lower the burden of taxation on the peasants by making landlords' incomes subject to income tax ; but they can prevent any Government from holding office which would be likely to offend the propertied class in this way. It is even proposed that a majority of two-thirds shall be necessary to unseat a Ministry by a vote of no-confidence : in other words, the vote of the princely contingent would alone suffice to sustain a Ministry. India, with the balance of political power determined by the princely contingent, will be ruled by its landlords.

The demand of the Indian people, including the subjects of the Princes, in so far as they dare express themselves, is that the rights of the Paramount Power should be exercised in future by the Federal Government, or to be precise, by the Viceroy on the advice of the Federal Ministry. If that were done, the worst menace of this federal arrangement would disappear, for this princely contingent would cease to be the reserve force of the Imperial Power within the Indian Parliament. This ready means of ruling India by division would no longer be available. On this, however, it is improbable that the Empire will give way. It has called in the Princes to hold the people in check, and presumably it knows what it is doing. There remains, however, another possibility, which would appreciably lessen this danger. It has been suggested that if paramountcy is vested in the Viceroy, acting in his personal capacity and not on the advice of his Ministers, there ought to be some tribunal which in the case of disputes would stand between him and the Princes. A Federal Supreme Court, if such a body should be created, would be the proper body for this purpose. It might serve as some slight check upon an arbitrary use of the Paramount Power, to enforce political discipline. If any declaration of civil rights could be introduced into the Constitution, a Supreme Court could perform a vastly more important service. It might enable the subjects of the more despotic Princes to impose upon their rulers some show of respect for the more elementary human rights. If it were also entrusted with the decision, whether any proposed legislation infringes minority rights, there would be fewer occasions for the exercise by Governors of their formidable powers of veto. There is danger as well

as advantage in the creation of a Supreme Court, charged with the interpretation of a written Constitution. It might interpret it, as the American Supreme Court does, consistently in the interests of property. But on the whole in India, the gain is likely to outweigh the danger. India stifles under arbitrary authority : against that, in all its forms, the first line of defence is law.

If the Indian peoples were free to follow their own interests and wishes in determining their relations with the Princes, their course would be clear. They would lay down in the Constitution a bold statement of the elementary rights, civil and political, which belong to every citizen of the Federation, and these must include the right to popular representation, on a defined franchise, in its Federal Assembly. The Princes on this conception would be free to enter, or to remain outside the Federation : but if they should decide to enter, it must be on conditions which ensure the minimum standards of a civilised life. If this plan were followed, Princes who delayed their entry would soon be exposed to agitation from their subjects, backed by the sympathy of all India. Against the intense sentiment of nationality, few of the Princes dare make a stand. If on the other hand, they enter on their own terms, withholding popular representation, and maintaining their customary pretensions to dispose of the persons and property of their subjects, the Federation and the Paramount Power are bound to protect them, and to defend them against a menacing agitation by their subjects, even though it should be for the conquest of rights which obtain throughout British India.

There remain in considering this Federal Constitution two subjects of the first importance, as to which the

Draft gives little or no guidance. By what procedure may this defective constitution be amended? Will the Princes have the same power to forbid its improvement, that they have had to maim it at the start? One sometimes felt in India last year the presage of revolution. Nothing will hasten the attempt so surely as the knowledge that peaceful change lies outside the scope of the people's will. Again, one does not know on what franchise the members of the two houses from British India will be elected. Almost certainly, the Provincial Legislatures will elect the Senators. The Lower House may be elected by some indirect process: if elected directly, it will be by an extremely restricted electorate, which will entirely exclude the peasant masses and the urban workers. For the latter special representation will doubtless be provided: organised Labour will at least be heard, though its voting power may be negligible: apparently no similar arrangement is proposed for the poorer peasant cultivators and tenants, who form the immense majority of the population of India.<sup>1</sup> Yet, at every turn in handling both federal and control subjects, the All-India Legislature will be disposing of their interests and fortunes. It may tax their salt, but alternately it might relieve their meagre diet of this charge by raising and spreading the income tax, which at present their landlords wholly escape. It will fix the tariff, and so determine the cost of much that they may buy. Over all this, it appears improbable that the peasants can exert any influence whatever: they will not have so much as a spokesman who might enter a protest.

<sup>1</sup> This might perhaps be done at need, by inviting the Co-operative Credit Societies to choose representatives of the peasants, as the Trade Unions may do for the workers.

Their interests will be confided to a Legislature dominated by those arch-landlords the Princes, balanced, if the more liberal proposal prevails, by representatives of British India who will speak for its propertied and professional class, but not for the masses in its villages.

*In the Provinces*

To the proposals for self-government in the Provinces one turns with a sense of relief. The complications which overwhelm us at the Centre are absent. There are no reserved subjects, no "untouchables" among the chapters of the Budget : nor are there Princes, thrust in like a wedge, to destroy democracy, with the Tory mallet to drive it home. The Provinces have not for Indian sentiment the importance of the Centre : they do not symbolise the unity of the Indian people : sovereignty resides in Delhi, and not in Madras or Lahore. Yet for the daily life of the people, the Provinces are the more important of the two. With them will lie the settlement of the whole agrarian problem : they fix the land revenue : they may strike at the root of Indian poverty by organising agriculture and rural industries : they may transform the mediæval mind of the masses by education : local government, with the chance of restoring the old self-governing village, is under their control, with forestry and irrigation, health and housing, labour legislation, and finally the police, whom an Indian Minister may teach, what no one else has yet taught them, to feel themselves the servants of the people. Here, rather than at the Centre, lies the hope of creative social legislation and of economic progress.

It is, then, even more important to secure genuine

democracy in the Provinces, than at the Centre. The same fear of popular representation shows itself, however, in the Draft. Six Indians among the thirty-five members of the Franchise Sub-Committee held that full adult suffrage was immediately practicable. The remainder agreed on a plan which is to enfranchise not less than 10, nor more than 25 per cent. of the total population—with a bias apparently towards the lower figure. The main qualification will be some rough measure of income, and in addition the vote will be bestowed on those who possess some educational qualification, or have served in the army, while some special consideration is suggested for women. It is not clear whether these latter qualifications confer plural votes. The meaning of these recommendations is evident. They will enfranchise the whole of the propertied and educated classes, including clerks and shop-keepers : they will include in the villages the relatively prosperous peasant-owners, and in towns presumably most of the craftsmen, foremen, and skilled artisans. They will exclude the poorer of the tenant cultivators, and the main body of the wage-earners in town and country. It is, in short, a proposal to debar from any influence over legislation those who stand in the direst need of it, those, in short, who have most to gain by the reform of land tenure, the lightening of taxation, the fixing of a minimum wage, and the improvement of housing. It will mean, one supposes, that about half the adult males will vote.

Some provision follows, however, for the poor. They are to be grouped in units of twenty, which will choose an elector, and these electors on their behalf will vote among their more fortunate neighbours. One reaches an

interesting equation : one labourer or tenant is entitled to one twentieth of the influence of a usurer or a landlord.

Presumably it was the old difficulty of illiteracy which weighed with the Committee, though they do not give their reasons. They do not escape it in this way : more than half of their enfranchised male electors will be illiterate. They have drawn a line against poverty rather than ignorance. But the difficulty is exaggerated. The villagers have the habit of discussion. They meet and talk under a shady tree at evening, sometimes about politics. The scholar of the village will often read the vernacular weekly paper aloud from beginning to end. I once came upon a village in which the leading articles of a Hindoo and of a Moslem paper were being read aloud alternately. In most of the villages which I visited there was little cleavage of interest or opinion. Everyone is poor : everyone is in debt : everyone has the same resentment against usurer and landlord—and the same dread of them. The village suffers and thinks as a unit : left free to itself, it would vote as a unit. The real problem is not how to secure an intelligent vote, but how to ensure a free vote. In the long run that will depend on the organisation of strong, militant peasants' leagues. No Constitution can do it ; but an unfortunate Constitution can render any approach to freedom impossible.

In a small village in the United Provinces which had three voters out of some ninety inhabitants, I had an illuminating talk with the peasants. The successful candidate, they said, had deceived them. He dressed in homespun and flaunted Congress colours on his car. Later, they learned their mistake : Congress was boycotting the election. "But," they added, "it would have made no

difference if we had known in time : we had to vote for him : he was our landlord." To understand their case, one must have heard, as I did, how the inhabitants of these overpopulated villages must bid against each other for the use of land : how little reality there is in the nominal security of tenure promised by law : how easily, and by what dodges, a landlord or his agent tricks them. Enfranchise that village as a whole, and it might have the courage to march as a solid unit to the poll, and vote for the peasants' candidate. Let it choose, as the Committee proposes, three or four persons to vote for it, and that will happen which happens to-day. They will be marked men, known to the landlord, his agent and the usurer. They are in debt: they tremble for their holdings; they have no receipts, even if they have paid every rupee of rent. They will vote as a matter of course for the landlord or his nominee. One cannot evict a whole village : one can very easily evict three men—or cause them to fear eviction, for that is enough. And if intimidation fails, there is bribery. It would be expensive to bribe a whole village ; but any moderately rich landlord can bribe one tenant in twenty. Of all the devices for fastening on the Indian masses the political yoke of their exploiters, indirect election is the crudest and the worst.

#### *The Communal Feud*

**F**OR the working of democracy, or indeed of any system of representative government in India, an indispensable condition is still lacking. The feud between the two religious communities has yet to be composed. If the Mohammedans, or a large and

influential section of them, succeed in imposing separate electorates, it will be difficult, in some provinces at least, to raise politics to the level of constructive action. The psychological effect of the separation is so evident that no British writer has ever defended it on its merits. So long as Moslems and Hindoos are herded apart in separate flocks, every candidate must commend himself first of all as a trusty defender of the faith. A competition is started as to which candidate or group is the more trusty defender ; the moderates, the rationalists, the men of both faiths with a modern outlook are either brushed aside, or forced to affect a zeal that they do not feel. The system keeps the two communities apart and prevents the growth of any habit of collaboration. Above all it prevents a modern grouping on lines of class or economic interest : while it lasts, parties will not base themselves upon any definite social programme. The effect of throwing these separate electorates together would be as obviously to put a premium on tolerance and moderation. The Hindoo who wishes to pick up even a few Moslem votes, will cease to remind his co-religionists that their cows are in danger : instead, he will talk about land tenure, or usury or housing. Until this happens, there will be no crystallisation of Indian groups into coherent parties.

The compromise which the Hindoo majority offers is adequate to secure a fair representation of minorities. Since Proportional Representation is thought to be too difficult, the plan (which has been tried successfully) is to reserve a number of seats for men of the minority creed, proportionate to its numbers. If Moslems are a third of the population, and a hundred seats have to be filled,

then the thirty-three Moslem candidates who receive the highest number of votes are declared to be elected. There cannot be less : there may be more. It is true that Hindoos votes may dilute and swell the Moslem poll, but equally Moslem votes may help to select the more tolerant Hindoos. The chance of unfair legislation is reduced to a minimum, if each creed has a motive to seek the other's votes. The "reservation of seats" is not an ideal arrangement, but it should serve to reassure a timid minority. Into the endless disputes which recur in each province, as to whether one should reckon each community by population, or by its number of qualified electors, I will not enter ; nor discuss what "weightage" (representation in excess of its exact proportion) a minority should receive. Men fight over such details, only because they do not mean to come to terms. If the Moslems would abandon separate electorates, the Hindoos would do well to meet them, within reason, on all these details. India can never be a nation until this feud is forgotten, nor will she, while it hampers her, be able to make full use of any measure of self-government however generous, to reshape her social structure. I am not sure that the British Government does right to preserve its passive attitude on this question. In the last resort, ought it not to impose its own opinion—a thing which it never hesitates to do, when any British interest is at stake ? That democracy should work in India is a British interest. There is a great majority for joint electorates, if one adds the modern-minded Moslems to the Hindoos. Indeed, Congress now claims that it has a larger Moslem membership than all the Mohammedan organisations together.

WHAT is the meaning of this feud? History began it: economics perpetuate it. The Mohammedans came in as military conquerors: sometimes they converted the idolators by force: always they destroyed their temples. Large numbers of the Hindoo population joined them from self-interest, usually to escape from the degradation of their position as members of some depressed caste—much, indeed, as Outcastes turn Christian to-day, though on a larger scale, for the jealous colour sense of Nordic Christianity checks conversion. A stage of toleration was reached, however, under the better of the Moghul Emperors, and the most interesting personality among them groped after an eclectic religion. One encounters among Mohammedans a certain dislike and contempt for Hindoo religion. With its mysticism, its sensuous symbolism, its all-embracing hospitality even for the most primitive beliefs, it is the most violent of all conceivable contrasts to their own austere unitarian creed. Yet I doubt whether theology plays a great part in perpetuating this feud. Indian Moslems, of whom the great majority are the descendants of converted Hindoos, often retain some of their old beliefs and usages, including caste. Old men have told me that in their youth it was usual, at the great festivals, for Indians of the two creeds to frequent each other's places of worship as an act of reverence and courtesy. There are, even to-day, districts where this practice survives. It is only recently that communal strife has begun to break out in some of the Indian States, a significant fact, if we knew how to interpret it. Even there, one supposes, one of the obvious causes of Moslem anger and Hindoo fear must be present. The

Islamic prohibition of usury is still obeyed by most Indian Moslems (though Pathans have no scruples), with the result that Hindoos exploit them, as Armenians used to exploit the Turks. Where the Hindoo usurer is also the dealer who handles the villagers' crops, a fierce and only too just resentment may grow up. It is intelligible, though theology is not the root of these poor men's emotion, that they take a savage pleasure in slaughtering the sacred cow of the grasping idolator. One often detects an under-current of dislike, when Hindoos talk freely about Moslems, but again it seems to have no direct relation to religion. Hindoos are amazingly tolerant towards other religions, indeed the fault of their thinking is rather that its outlines lack definition : they cannot reject or deny. Their implied criticism is rather that in mind Moslems are elementary, in manners rough, in their attitude towards women brutal. But this dislike, in its turn, will seek an outlet when it is roused, in an insult to religion. A Hindoo mob, in this mood, goes in procession past a mosque (often in India open to the sky and visible from the street) with its band playing, with the deliberate intention of disturbing the worshippers at their prayers. In this way, or by a chance quarrel in a crowded market-place, riots and even massacres begin, though sometimes (as in Decca last year, when Moslem villagers sacked the Hindoo town) there is evidence of preparation and incitement, and strong ground for suspecting the leadership of notable persons.

The new fact of our generation in British India has been the bitter competition between educated Hindoos and Moslems for offices and jobs. The Hindoos have much the higher intellectual tradition, and are usually the

wealthier of the two communities : they absorbed European education earlier, more readily and in much larger numbers than the Moslems, and tended for long to monopolise both the learned professions and the public services recruited by examination. Perceiving the advantage which their rivals had won, the Moslems have of late valued education more highly. They now wage a continual struggle to secure the reservation to their co-religionists of public appointments proportionate to their numbers. The demand has even been solemnly put forward that a third or a half of the professorships in a given University must be reserved for Moslems. In some technical colleges a third of the students' places are reserved for them, and Hindoos who have won higher marks in the Entrance Examination may be rejected. Care is taken in Bombay Presidency that precisely one-third of the veterinary surgeons shall pray with their faces to Mecca. Life, in this atmosphere of jealous competition, is poisoned for these young men from the start, for failure to utilise religion to secure a job may doom a man, in this overpopulated land, to hopeless unemployment for life. Religion has acquired a new economic value, and India, while she loses faith, is cursed by the divisions of her decaying creeds.

Against this economic background, in a society very slow to realise the opportunities which industry and agriculture offer, the significance of separate communal electorates can be understood. They are part of a mechanism of public life which serves an ignoble struggle for jobs and patronage. With the exception of Congress, which is a party of opposition, groups and parties tend to be, rather more flagrantly than in Europe, associations for dividing the spoil. On this weakness a skilful bureaucracy

has learned to play, and in the Provincial Councils it recruits majorities by dispensing honours and posts, as cynically as ever Walpole did. It is, I think this sense of dependence on a foreign arbiter which in recent years has done most to keep the two communities apart. It is, I am sure, a crude slander to say, as Indians usually do, that the bureaucracy consciously stirs up strife between the two communities. Its tradition is above that baseness. But it is keenly aware of the advantage which their divisions give it. The intense anxiety of the English Conservative Press to preserve separate communal electorates has been most illuminating. An English bureaucrat, with Indians under him and around him, need never verbally express an improper wish. But if for an instant there should cross his sub-conscious mind the perception that divisions enable him to rule, the sensitive antennæ of a subject race will perceive it. An unspoken wish, even though it be sub-conscious, as Ibsen knew when he wrote *The Master Builder*, will sometimes realise itself.

This feud has postponed India's liberation by many a year : it is the worst peril which a self-governing India will have to face. I have heard Mohammedans talking openly of the ease with which, from a base in the self-governing Punjab, with the North-West Province and Sind at its door, they will one day reconquer India. That is a silly boast : they remember the Moghuls, and forget the Mahrattas. The balance of fighting strength, with the Sikhs on the Hindoo side, is in fact fairly even, even if one supposes, as our soldiers always do, that the potential fighting strength of the Hindoos is confined to the so-called martial races. In fact a slow but perceptible change is going on, and Hindoos, who have trained themselves

for ages to a conscious control of their bodies,<sup>1</sup> are in the younger generation gaining a less passive, a more martial habit of mind, which Mr. Gandhi's influence has only partially checked. Courage can be acquired by self-discipline. One is apt to forget that the Sikhs were once unwarlike Hindoos : they deliberately schooled themselves to fight. One may question the usual English belief that the Moslems could dominate India : yet the plans and ambitions which such speculations reveal, are an ever-present mental reality : spoken, or repressed, they do influence Indian politics. They will fade and disappear in proportion as a positive creative will asserts itself in the Indian nation. This people, with its quick brain and its genius for self-less devotion, will cease to fritter its strength in communal rivalries and the struggle of parties for jobs, when it conceives the task of building a new India. So soon as it has the power to change its economic environment, its social structure and its inherited mind, must not the ambition to do these great and difficult things awaken ? If once the intellect of India is fruitfully busy with the problems of rural reconstruction, of physical regeneration and of mass education, it must forget these childish rivalries. There will be work enough for its combative instincts in the struggle against parasitic classes.

<sup>1</sup> A Bengali student who resolved to take to terrorism, overcame his physical fear of wounds and death by a kind of *yoga* discipline. He visualised his own face streaming with blood, and then repeated to himself: "It is warm: it is a beautiful colour."

*A Forecast*

ONE tries to pierce the darkness and uncertainty that hide the future of India from our eyes. Nine times in ten it is safe for the prophet to assume that the future will resemble the past. He will go wrong, if he makes that assumption, only occasionally, when some startling event, at once creative and destructive, such an event as the Russian Revolution, sweeps away the shaping forces and the distorting repressions of the past. Is Mr. Gandhi's movement such an event? Has rebel India in fact achieved a revolution? I am not sure: a prophet with any reputation to lose would delay his predictions, until the results of the second Round Table Conference are known. The reader who accepts my estimate of the power of the Congress movement will not be surprised when I say that the future pivots mainly on the question whether the Constitution which emerges is one which Congress will consent to work. There are three possibilities. It may think the Constitution so bad that it will resume its resistance, organise once more the refusal of taxes, boycott the elections, and attempt by all the means at its command to bring British rule to an end. In that event a long period of revolutionary struggle will have opened. Its course will be influenced by conditions largely foreign to India. A sharp rise in the world prices of agricultural produce would check it: a revolutionary collapse in Central Europe would favour it. My own belief is that if this struggle should be resumed with a trade depression as its background, it will develop inevitably into an agrarian revolution, which will shake the structure of Indian society as well as the Imperial connection. The struggle will not for

long remain non-violent : the next phase may be an attempt to use Sinn Fein tactics, and terrorism with its blundering cruelty will break out. If the attempt is made to impose and work the new Constitution in these conditions, it will mean that a small upper stratum, the Princes, with a few of the wealthier and more conservative men of the older generation will nominally administer it, trusting in fact to the " steel framework " of the Civil Service and the military power behind it. That attempt, if the folly of either side at the Round Table should doom India to undergo it, could end only in tragic failure.

The second possibility, the most probable of the three alternatives, is that the result of the Conference will seem to Congress neither good enough to accept, nor bad enough to resist. It will not resume civil disobedience, nor boycott the elections, but neither will it take office. It will enter the Elected Chambers and Councils as a critical, irresponsible Opposition. In that case the future will have a dreary resemblance to the past. The parties and groups formed on a religious basis with the vaguest of social programmes, which consent to take office, will continue the opportunist performance of to-day : they will get their deserts—honours, titles and posts. The same ineffectual persons will succeed each other through brief ministerial terms, submitting with remarkable calm—as Ministers often do in England—to the direction of their bureaucratic subordinates. This will not be an Indian India, although in the Services persons with dark skins will gradually replace persons with whitish skins. Behind these dark skins, however, the Anglo-Indian tradition will live on, losing, one fears, every year something of the present efficiency and something of the present immunity from

corruption. With a slight Indian accent (oddly reminiscent of Welsh), the old excuses, based on the need for sound finance and rigid economy, will be repeated for the slowness of the imperceptible advance towards universal education, an adequate health service and better housing. The burden of taxation will not be shifted from the poorer peasants to the landlords, and half-hearted reforms will leave the system of land tenure substantially unchanged. The Opposition will perorate, but in the Federal Parliament the Princes will vote it down, and in the Provinces the propertied groups, resting on a limited and indirect franchise. One considerable change there will be, however. The big modern capitalist interests will have their way. Tariffs and bounties will foster industry, and promote the growth of jerry-built and insanitary towns, while the villages will languish. Congress, condemned to the sterile rôle of Opposition and deprived of the stimulus of a national struggle, will break into its component parts. Its wealthy, conservative element will move towards the opportunist groups, to join, sooner or later, in the scramble for office. Others will lose their interest in politics, especially if a rise in world prices (or a local rise due to tariffs) should bring about a revival of business. The salutary psychological effect even of an unsatisfactory grant of rather nominal freedom will meanwhile work. The corrosive sense of a predestined inferiority will vanish from the younger owners of dark skins. They will imitate less slavishly, but at the same time they will dare to take from the West what it has to bestow—physical and economic science. They will criticise their elders, themselves and their whole Indian heritage with a growing freedom. As their wills and their limbs mature, they will grow impatient

to create a new India. The Left Wing of Congress, meanwhile (especially if Mr. Gandhi should quit politics and retire to his *ashram*), will go its way as a party of peasants and workers, attempting to solve the problem of Indian poverty sometimes by efforts within the Elected Chambers, more often by rent-strikes and a resort to the tactics of civil disobedience. There will be spasmodic agrarian revolts among the peasants, and democratic risings (on Gandhist lines) against the Princes. Suppression at first will be easy, but however slowly (if a bad franchise and a rigid Constitution render peaceful change unduly difficult) these movements will gather revolutionary momentum, until in the fulness of time (when the next Tory Government has duly expelled the Soviet Embassy from London) they attract the sympathetic interest of Moscow. But here the Sibyl's roll grows dim.

¶ The third possibility is that the Round Table produces a Constitution which Congress can accept and work. For that I hope : I dare not say that I expect it. The first essential is that it should be open to amendment without undue difficulty, both in its organic chapters and in its franchise provisions. Some reduction there must be of the debt and of the military charges, and the "Indianisation" of the Services must proceed at a perceptible pace. A declaration of civil rights enforceable by the High Court must cover the whole Federation. If the friends of India have any influence, they will use it, first of all, with British statesmen to widen such concessions to the utmost, and then with Congress itself to bring about a whole-hearted acceptance. A renewal of the struggle cannot be confined to passive resistance : terrorism will breed madness and cruelty in both camps, and leave behind it a memory of

hatred that will curse India for generations, as surely as the monuments of the Mutiny poison the mind of every passer-by to-day. A half-acceptance would be little better, and in either event, if one takes a long-range view, the ultimate outcome may be not an Indian but a Muscovite India.

The gain of an acceptance even of an imperfect Constitution would lie in this, that the dynamics of the problem would be solved. A poor Constitution may work and yield results, if a strong party, with its roots among the masses, is bent on extracting from it the utmost that it will yield. There is in India only one such party : its strength lies in its ability to touch the emotional springs of the people, and to draw from it activity, endurance and supplies. If its leaders will for the first time enter and form Ministries, it will be their own fault if their English official subordinates contrive to manage and overbear them. They will have, what no Indian Minister has ever yet had, a great party behind them. Even the power of veto, which looks formidable on paper, would seldom be invoked against a Ministry which had the electorate behind it. Even under a hampering Constitution there is very much that a strong party with the administrative machinery in its hands could do. It might tap the hoards of buried gold for its constructive purposes. It might launch on a wide front a campaign of enlightenment to bring intelligence into agriculture, to create village industries, and raise the standards of health and housing. No foreign Government can do this, nor yet an Indian Government which relies on the old bureaucratic methods. It can be done only by a Government which guides and controls throughout India a legion of volunteers, who will apply

its legislation, organise the peasants, put life and motion into the village councils and teach them what they must do. I do not know whether Congress has the capacity for such a task : certainly no other party has it. It will not go far, however, in such an effort without discovering that it must prepare to wage war against anti-social forces and parasitic classes entrenched within its own ranks. It will have to face the loss of many of its *zemindars*, *banias*, and mill-owners, and rejoice when they go. India will remain backward, poor and anaemic while they eat her harvest. Little can be achieved in the North till the landlord disappears : nor can the battle with poverty be won without a frontal attack on superstition and tradition. Under whatever banner, this nation in its first decade of freedom will make the transition from the national to the social struggle. There is a rebel India which will not pile its arms till on liberated fields the peasant garners for wife and child the harvest he has reaped.